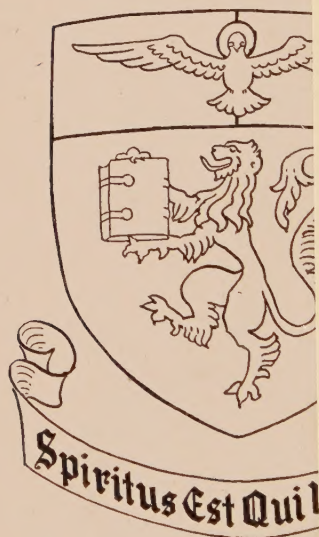



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GEORGIAN STORIES

1925



GEORGIAN STORIES

1925

BY

Michael Arlen

Martin Armstrong

E. M. Forster

L. P. Hartley

Richard Hughes

Aldous Huxley

F. Tennyson Jesse

Naomi Mitchison

C. E. Montague

Arnold Palmer

Osbert Sitwell

Frank Penn-Smith

J. C. Squire

Horace Annesley Vachell

Hugh Kingsmill

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GEORGIAN STORIES

1925

MICHAEL ARLEN

THE SHAMELESS BEHAVIOUR OF A LORD¹

I

THIS is quite a simple story, but it is about a lord. The lord in question was John Tiberius Vincent de Guy, second Viscount Paramour, and he was wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. He was, in fact, so wealthy that Mr. Otto Kahn stood at attention when speaking to him and Mr. John D. Rockefeller burnt his tongue with his hot milk at the mere mention of his name. Of course, young Lord Paramour had not made the money himself; he merely decorated it. His father, the late Watt A. Guy, will be remembered as the inventor and promoter of the Paramour Safety Hairpin: which, it has been said, has made a deeper impression on contemporary life than any other invention except Beecham's Pills. It was thought pretty decent of the old man that, when one day as he lay on his death-bed the Prime Minister dropped in to hand him a Viscounty, he instantly took as his title the name which had made his millions, and died Lord Paramour; in

¹ With apologies to, I believe, Catulle Mendès, but I am not sure, for I have not read his works. I would like to, but my French is limited. On the publication of this tale in a journal, a friend told me that the idea had already been used by Catulle Mendès: but I have retained it, I am not sure why.

which choice some people of the meaner sort have professed to find a particular aptness, for had not (they asked) the most famous advertisement of the hairpins, that one which has for more than a decade been emblazoned in coloured lights across the eastern end of Piccadilly Circus and has raised advertisement to the majesty of an institution—had not those letters of fire beseeched: “Buy Paramour, Lord of Hairpins. No woman Should be Without”? Whereupon, to be sure, no woman was.

Of young Lord Paramour it must be said that he was a gentleman of spirit; the war found him no laggard; but he was not ambitious in the arts of peace. It pained some of his most worthy friends to see with what indomitable energy he pursued the professions of leisure and luxury; that he used his immense fortune and unusual parts—which it has always been the pleasure of worthy persons to discern in the immensely rich—to no other advantage than the decorations of his various palaces and castles, the lavish entertainment of his friends therein, and only the most unthinking exercise of charity; but those nearest to him were most of all displeased at his evasion of his duty to his line and to society, for young Lord Paramour showed a strong disinclination to marry. A pageant of young ladies of quality was passed before him in review, but he either heeded them not or remarked, in a most amiable manner, on the imperfections of line, carriage, and cosmetics which (he said) were apparent in the most recent generation of young ladies. There were not, of course, wanting a few ladies of determination to make a formidable attack on his celibacy on behalf of their daughters; but young Lord Paramour withstood them with what can only be called a humiliating ease.



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MICHAEL ARLEN

II

The Albert Hall Ball, in aid of the hospitals of London, will be remembered by many people as one of the most brilliant entertainments of the brilliant season of 1922. But it will be remembered by Mrs. Lyon-West—she was a New York Lyon before she married a Hampshire West—for a remarkable conversation with young Lord Paramour, who, after dancing with her beautiful daughter, had drifted into her box. The word “drifted” is here used in its strictly nautical sense, for Lord Paramour had not the faintest idea whose box he was entering. He had, after having danced with Miss Lyon-West (whose name he did not know, which is a grave reflection on the present state of society), discovered a distaste for the company of his guests in his own box, and had wandered to the first door he saw and shoved it open. Lord Paramour was an abstemious young man, but that night he had indulged in a glass or so of wine, wittily remarking to a friend that “a chap can’t dance in cold blood.”

“Why, good evening, Lord Paramour!” cried Mrs. Lyon-West brightly.

“Ah,” said Lord Paramour. “’Evening. Sorry, I’m sure.” And he proceeded to drift out of the box again.

“But please don’t go so soon, Lord Paramour! I am *delighted* to see you. Only a moment ago I was remarking how *beautifully* you and my daughter were dancing together!”

“Your daughter? Ah!” And Lord Paramour, who couldn’t for the life of him remember the lady’s name, nor where he had met her, sat down and regarded her benevolently. “Better call her madam,” he thought to himself.

"Enchanting girl, madam. Enchanting dancer. Enchanting lines. Enchanting everything. In fact, madam, a very adequate girl, your daughter."

"I am *so* glad you like her," said Mrs. Lyon-West brightly. Mrs. Lyon-West had a reputation to keep up as to brightness.

"Like her, madam!" cried Lord Paramour. "I like her enormously. Most girls, I find, are rather tiresome—but your daughter, madam, is most unusual. And she is witty, which is remarkable in a girl. Please don't deny it—I distinctly heard her say something witty while we were dancing. She said, if I remember aright: 'The art of dancing is not to dance but to avoid other dancers.' Now that, madam, is a *mot*, in fact it is a *bon mot*. I am very partial to a *bon mot*, madam. And considering that I had just bumped the back of her head into some ass's elbow, I think it was very apt of her. I was much impressed by your daughter, madam."

"Of course," said Mrs. Lyon-West, "looks aren't everything. A woman should be clever as well as beautiful——"

"Exactly," said Lord Paramour. "Exactly. Or quite."

"She reads such a lot!" sighed Mrs. Lyon-West.

"Well, well, there's nothing like reading," said Lord Paramour. "Personally, I can never find anything to read these days. Lot of septic trash."

"But you are so fastidious, Lord Paramour!"

"Oh, not at the moment, madam!"

"Well, then, why are you so long getting married?" asked Mrs. Lyon-West with a bright smile.

"Lot of trash," again sighed Lord Paramour. "Young women very inferior these days, madam. Always, of course, excepting your daughter."

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"Don't except her. Marry her," said Mrs. Lyon-West wittily.

"Not bad, that!" chuckled Lord Paramour. "But not good, either. Would she, d'you think, consider my advances favourably?"

Mrs. Lyon-West thought she would, and Lord Paramour sighed.

"Shall I tell you," he put to her, "something that I have never told anyone else? Shall I tell you why I have never married, and why I cannot marry your daughter, enchanting though she is? Are you sure you will not be offended?"

"Tell me," said Mrs. Lyon-West. "Oh, please tell me!" She had not dreamed of getting so far.

"Well, it's like this," began Lord Paramour sadly. "But I must put it delicately. If you have read or seen 'Trilby,' you will remember that the three artist fellows were terribly upset on hearing that Trilby had sat to another artist fellow for the 'altogether.' You get my meaning, madam? You are not offended?"

Mrs. Lyon-West said she did and she wasn't.

"Well, then, it's like this. I am, madam, incapable, constitutionally, physically, and mentally incapable of marrying anyone whom I have not seen in the 'altogether.' "

"Sir," said Mrs. Lyon-West, "how dare you?"

"That's just the point," sighed Lord Paramour. "I daren't. And that's why I can't marry anyone." He rose, saying sadly: "I knew you would be offended. Women are odd. Good night, madam. Sorry, I'm sure. Enchanting girl, your daughter. She has promised me this dance. Good night, madam."

"Sir," said Mrs. Lyon-West, "good night."

III

Now a digression here on the attitude of worldly mothers to their daughters might be of interest, but would not further this story. Let it suffice, in the chronicle of the shameless behaviour of young Lord Paramour, to say that Mrs. Lyon-West was a mother after the Roman model, and exacted from her offspring no less than abject obedience in all matters which might pertain to her welfare; in which she was helped by the fact that her beautiful daughter, in the days following the Albert Hall Ball, showed a pleasing inclination for the company of the witty and elegant Lord Paramour. Whereupon Mrs. Lyon-West asked him down to the Lyon-West place for the week-end.

The omission of Mr. Lyon-West from this story may seem marked; and if we are going down there with Lord Paramour politeness demands a glance at him. Meet Mr. Lyon-West. He is a little gentleman with an amiable eye and a hard and soft tennis court on his head. He does not matter very much.

Among the other guests at the house-party, as they revealed themselves after dinner on Saturday night, were Lord Pro and Lady Con—who, as of course you know, is a Beaver in her own right. That amiable baronet, Sir Courtenay Langouste, sat in a secluded corner reading the 68th edition of *If Winter Comes* while his lady near-by cut the pages of the 69th edition. Major-General Sir Auction Bridges was with Mr. Soda, hotly contesting Mr. Soda's theory that hiccups was an infectious disease and could be prevented by inoculation. Lady Savoury, our first female M.P. and a great Improver, went about from group to group, indignantly remarking that it

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served Oscar Wilde right if only for saying that work is the curse of our drinking classes. Mrs. Custard, on the other hand, retired early, complaining that she was very short of long gloves.

During a break in the conversation, which was witty and sustained, Lord Paramour was understood to say that he would not be going to divine service the next day; and his hostess was obliging enough to say that, in that case, she too would not go to the morning service, but would walk Lord Paramour round the grounds; which would, she said, repay an early morning visit. Mrs. Lyon-West was understood to say that she came to the country to rest.

As, next morning, the countryside sweetly echoed with the songs of birds and church-bells, Lord Paramour and his hostess stepped out of the house upon the velvet sward. The broad sweep of park and woodland lay before them, soft and mellow in the haze of the morning sun, and Lord Paramour suggested a brisk walk, but Mrs. Lyon-West begged to be excused, saying she was enamoured of her rose-garden; in which direction, skirting the spacious house, they leisurely betook themselves, talking of this and that in an elegant way.

"Penelope," said Mrs. Lyon-West—for such was her daughter's name—"Penelope loves gardens. Especially rose-gardens."

"Indeed?" said Lord Paramour. "Well, there's nothing like a rose-garden."

"*How* I agree with you!" said Mrs. Lyon-West brightly. "Penelope, however, carries it almost to an infatuation."

"'Pon my word!" said Lord Paramour.

"Yes, Lord Paramour. During the rose season, for in-

stance, she *insists* on occupying a suite on the ground floor, from which she can at any moment step out and bathe herself in the beauty of the flowers. . . .”

“You turn a phrase very prettily, madam.”

“Oh, *thank* you, Lord Paramour,” breathed Mrs. Lyon-West. “But, as you will understand, her occupying a bedroom and a bathroom just *there* makes things just a leetle awkward. For she *insists* on having her blinds drawn open, so that she may enjoy the roses over her toilet, and so *of course* the gardeners cannot enter the rose-garden during the moment, as it distracts them from their work.”

“Lazy dogs!” cried Lord Paramour.

“Ah, here it is!” cried his hostess as, rounding an angle of the house, they came upon the rose-garden. “It is supposed to be the best rose-garden in the country.”

“Enchanting,” said Lord Paramour. “Enchanting, considering the gardeners do no work in it in the mornings.”

“Oh, there’s Niblick, the agent!” cried Mrs. Lyon-West. “I *must* speak to him for a moment. Do excuse me a moment, Lord Paramour. I will be back in *one* moment.”

Lord Paramour, of course, excused her; and very pleasantly whiled away twenty minutes with a cigarette in the rose-garden. He paced about. . . . He saw the roses. . . . He saw a rose in particular, a white one. . . .

IV

The day passed in elegant conversation, as is the way with the landed gentry all the world over. Lord Paramour and Miss Lyon-West, beautiful in vermilion *organdie*, went for a walk in the afternoon; but on their return Mrs. Lyon-West observed on her daughter’s cheeks

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none of those signs of pretty confusion which denote a happy consummation; they were still the pale cheeks of a young lady of fashion; they were unmantled.

Now it has frequently been said of Mrs. Lyon-West that she is indiscreet; but never that she is not brave.

That night, when the gentlemen had joined the ladies, and Mrs. Custard had retired, saying she had to go to Paris early in the morning as she was very short of long gloves, Mrs. Lyon-West addressed herself to Lord Paramour brightly:

"I hope," she said, "that you enjoyed your walk in the rose garden?"

"Enchanting!" said Lord Paramour. "Enchanting!"

"I'm *so* glad you liked it," breathed Mrs. Lyon-West; and she looked at him steadfastly, the brave woman. "Well, Lord Paramour?"

"Ah," said Lord Paramour thoughtfully.

She created a diversion by requiring a light for her cigarette, which Mr. Soda, with his well-known *galanterie*, instantly supplied.

"The only thing I'm not sure about," whispered Lord Paramour, "is whether I like her nose. Sorry I'm sure."

MARTIN ARMSTRONG

THE MATERIALIST

AT last the service was over and Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth emerged into the brilliant sunshine of the churchyard and took the path leading to the wicket that opened into their own garden. It was always a critical occasion and demanded the most delicate manipulation on both sides. For this was the only Sunday in the year on which Mr. Wadsworth went to church and he did this solely to humour Mrs. Wadsworth: so that after the ceremony there was a certain tensivity in the situation. Mr. Wadsworth's temper had been severely tried. This yearly homage to convention and Mrs. Wadsworth seemed to him absurd, yet Mrs. Wadsworth, he could see, set great store by it, and he was willing to sink his own inclinations since by doing so he could give her so much happiness. But again, the very fact that it should make her happy vexed him, because it showed so clearly that she could not value his motives for not going to church. Yet Mr. Wadsworth's motives were not trivial: they were deeply sincere, so sincere that he did not even claim reason for them. Anti-Goddite though he was, he was accustomed, in all the profounder problems of life, simply to follow an intuition in which he trusted completely, and what more, after all, did the Goddites, with their *conscience*,



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MARTIN ARMSTRONG

profess to do? For Mr. Wadsworth, whatever that intuition rebelled against was wrong, whatever it approved was right: he had seen too much of the fallibility of human logic to allow it supremacy in ultimate things. Evidently then Mr. Wadsworth could boast a faith as unswerving as the best of the Goddites, and it was Mrs. Wadsworth's low estimation of his faith that wounded him. Not that she expressed or even realized her attitude, but this exaction of yearly tribute implied it quite unmistakably. And so Mr. Wadsworth was aware on the way home of a strong impulse to make sarcastic and profane remarks about the service: he felt vaguely that only by so doing could he readjust the balance so monstrously upset by this annual distortion of himself, and it required all his strength of mind to refrain, indeed he could only do so by refraining from speech altogether. As for Mrs. Wadsworth, poor lady, she clung desperately to this yearly concession, for she had the conviction that if she could ensure his going to church even only once a year, he would be saved from the terrible fate of all disbelievers: and each year as they left the church she longed to ply him with questions about his impressions of the service in the blind hope of eliciting some sign of grace from him. And she, too, had to exercise incredible self-restraint in order to refrain, for to do otherwise, her good sense told her, would be to provoke inevitable disaster. But one of them must say something, for, as they walked together down the path, the silence was rapidly becoming absurd.

"The sermon was a little long," she ventured indulgently.

Mr. Wadsworth instantly exploded. "The sermon was infernally long, Elizabeth, and as arrant nonsense as I have heard these ten years." Then, relieved by this out-

burst, he regained control of himself. What a beast he was! He was only hurting her feelings. And, as another silence began to accumulate he made a supreme effort.

"The choir has improved, Elizabeth; they sang the hymns well . . . in fact, admirably." That *admirably* almost choked him, and he remained silent until they reached the house, remembering with acute discomfort how, as they entered the church, he had seen the deadly eye of the Vicar's wife duly register his arrival, and how insufferably, as they came out of it, the pious Miss Mott had smiled at him—the smile of a saint welcoming a rescued sinner. "A detestable prig," he muttered to himself. But to Mrs. Wadsworth that small commendation of the choir had been sufficient. She felt happy and secure about him now and the charming smile on her face drew one from his as they entered the house. . . .

He shut away their prayer-books into the hall drawer and hurried upstairs to change his infected clothes. He undressed with fury, although there was not the smallest reason for hurry, and got out his most disreputable clothes. As he pulled them on, he felt that he was re-assuming his normal personality, and feeling freer and cooler he went downstairs.

In the hall his wife patted him on the back. It was a near thing: he felt his ill-temper boil up dangerously like milk in a pan. How unreasonable, how false the whole situation was! Why did she insist on perpetuating it year after year, instead of letting him go his own way, as he let her go hers? Each year it brought this uncomfortable constraint into otherwise harmonious relations. But, as he took his old, greasy hat from the hall table and felt it settle easily and softly round his head, his temper subsided without boiling over. A warm puff of rose-

scented air came from the open door and at once a wave of contentment broke over him. He took his wife's arm and they went together into the garden. . . .

One afternoon, a few days later, Mr. Wadsworth crossed the hall with sketching materials. "If you want me, Elizabeth," he called to his wife, "you will find me in the church, sketching."

Since his visit to church, Mr. Wadsworth noticed that various beautiful details of the church kept rising again and again to the surface of his mind. He thought of the lovely thirteenth-century glass in the East window, the Norman chapel on the right of the choir, the delicately carved canopy of the tomb opposite to it. But, as if to something which included and symbolized them all, his mind returned with a still deeper wonder and delight to the old well under the altar which had been a sacred place long before the church had been built or Christianity had been brought to Britain. Then these constantly recurring thoughts grew into an irresistible desire to sketch those things, and following his usual habit, Mr. Wadsworth immediately obeyed the impulse.

For three days he worked away with pencil and brush and at the end of that time it became clear to him that he did not really want to sketch these things at all. No, he saw perfectly now that his desire had been simply to be in the church, to have all its beautiful details about him and to take them, somehow, into his mind; and now he realized unmistakably that he had invented the sketching merely as an excuse for going into the church. From that moment Mr. Wadsworth ceased to sketch, but he kept his sketching things before him, for how, otherwise, could he, if he were discovered, account for his presence there? People go to church for religious, artistic, or antiquarian reasons and for no other reason whatever. But he was

there for none of these reasons : his reason for being there was not definable.

Next day things had become even more transparent in his mind. He felt still as he always felt about the customary forms of worship and belief : the thought of his annual attendance at the service was no less irritating, but now he was aware that as he sat alone in the church he was in communion, with a certain current of life. Spiritual, supernatural? His mind vigorously denied it. He did not believe in the spiritual or the supernatural. For him the universe was a material universe, and the material, the physical, was the only reality. But it was precisely with reality that Mr. Wadsworth felt himself to be in touch as he sat in the church. He seemed to be experiencing not a refutation of his materialistic theory of life, but a deeper confirmation of it. He was, he felt, in touch with the humanity, the sum of human delight and human effort, which had created the church, the Norman chapel, the glass of the East window, and, long before that, had venerated the sacred well. To enter the church was to immerse himself in that humanity and so to become part of it.

And then, as his emotions defined themselves yet more clearly, he became conscious of a longing to take part in formal acts. He was strongly impelled to cross himself, to walk up the nave with arms extended upwards, to fall down in reverence before the altar-stone which covered the well. It was the acts themselves which he desired : the accepted significance of them did not interest him, indeed he felt a strong antipathy to it. But the acts, the gestures themselves, seemed to answer some profound need in his emotional life. What did it mean? He could not tell, but, though unexplained, the fact existed none the less : evidently then they possessed some deep and

hidden efficacy. Mr. Wadsworth had always been completely frank with himself. It was his frankness, his refusal to submit to any compromise in his mental attitude to life, which had made him throw over what he had been brought up to call religion: and now, with no sense of doing anything unreasonable, he was ready to admit the value of these seemingly mysterious acts when once he was sure of the emotional appeal. He went to the door and turned the key in the lock. There was no doubt or shame in his mind at what he was going to do, but he knew that if he were seen he would be misunderstood, that it would be thought either that he was mad or that he had come over to the Goddites. He knew that he would never be able even to make Elizabeth understand.

Then, when the door was locked, he walked up the nave, passed under the rood-screen, and in an ecstasy of delight and liberation flung himself on the stone floor before the altar. . . .

As he came out of the porch into the churchyard a bell began to ring and he was shocked to meet Miss Mott coming in. "There is a service in ten minutes," she said politely.

"Yes," replied Mr. Wadsworth, "I have just escaped in time, haven't I?"

E. M. FORSTER

THE STORY OF THE SIREN

FEW things have been more beautiful than my notebook on the Deist Controversy as it fell downward through the waters of the Mediterranean. It dived, like a piece of black slate, but opened soon, disclosing leaves of pale green, which quivered into blue. Now it had vanished, now it was a piece of magical india-rubber stretching out to infinity, now it was a book again, but bigger than the book of all knowledge. It grew more fantastic as it reached the bottom, where a puff of sand welcomed it and obscured it from view. But it reappeared, quite sane though a little tremulous, lying decently open on its back, while unseen fingers fidgeted among its leaves.

"It is such a pity," said my aunt, "that you will not finish your work in the hotel. Then you would be free to enjoy yourself and this would never have happened."

"Nothing of it but will change into something rich and strange," warbled the chaplain, while his sister said, "Why, it's gone in the water!" As for the boatmen, one of them laughed, while the other, without a word of warning, stood up and began to take his clothes off.

"Holy Moses!" cried the Colonel. "Is the fellow mad?"

"Yes, thank him, dear," said my aunt: "that is to say, tell him he is very kind, but perhaps another time."



© Russell

E. M. FORSTER

"All the same I do want my book back," I complained. "It's for my Fellowship Dissertation. There won't be much left of it by another time."

"I have an idea," said some woman or other through her parasol. "Let us leave this child of Nature to dive for the book while we go on to the other grotto. We can land him either on this rock or on the ledge inside, and he will be ready when we return."

The idea seemed good; and I improved it by saying I would be left behind too, to lighten the boat. So the two of us were deposited outside the little grotto on a great sunlit rock that guarded the harmonies within. Let us call them blue, though they suggest rather the spirit of what is clean—cleanliness passed from the domestic to the sublime, the cleanliness of all the sea gathered together and radiating light. The Blue Grotto at Capri contains only more blue water, not bluer water. That colour and that spirit is the heritage of every cave in the Mediterranean into which the sun can shine and the sea flow.

As soon as the boat left I realized how imprudent I had been to trust myself on a sloping rock with an unknown Sicilian. With a jerk he became alive, seizing my arm and saying, "Go to the end of the grotto and I will show you something beautiful."

He made me jump off the rock on to the ledge over a dazzling crack of sea; he drew me away from the light till I was standing on the tiny beach of sand which emerged like powdered turquoise at the farther end. There he left me with his clothes and returned swiftly to the summit of the entrance rock. For a moment he stood naked in the brilliant sun, looking down at the spot where the book lay. Then he crossed himself, raised his hands above his head, and dived.

If the book was wonderful, the man is past all descrip-

tion. His effect was that of a silver statue, alive beneath the sea, through whom life throbbed in blue and green. Something infinitely happy, infinitely wise—but it was impossible that it should emerge from the depths sunburned and dripping, holding the notebook on the Deist Controversy between its teeth.

A gratuity is generally expected by those who bathe. Whatever I offered, he was sure to want more, and I was disinclined for an argument in a place so beautiful and also so solitary. It was a relief that he should say in conversational tones, "In a place like this one might see the Siren."

I was delighted with him for thus falling into the key of his surroundings. We had been left together in a magic world, apart from all the commonplaces that are called reality, a world of blue whose floor was the sea and whose walls and roof of rock trembled with the sea's reflections. Here only the fantastic would be tolerable, and it was in that spirit I echoed his words, "One might easily see the Siren."

He watched me curiously while he dressed. I was parting the sticky leaves of the notebook as I sat on the sand.

"Ah!" he said at last. "You may have read the little book that was printed last year. Who would have thought that our Siren would have given the foreigners pleasure!"

(I read it afterward. Its account is, not unnaturally, incomplete, in spite of there being a woodcut of the young person, and the words of her song.)

"She comes out of this blue water, doesn't she," I suggested, "and sits on the rock at the entrance, combing her hair."

I wanted to draw him out, for I was interested in his

sudden gravity, and there was a suggestion of irony in his last remark that puzzled me.

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Often and often."

"I, never."

"But you have heard her sing!"

He put on his coat and said impatiently, "How can she sing under the water? Who could? She sometimes tries, but nothing comes from her but great bubbles."

"She should climb on to the rock."

"How can she?" he cried again, quite angry. "The priests have blessed the air, so she cannot breathe it, and blessed the rocks, so that she cannot sit on them. But the sea no man can bless, because it is too big, and always changing. So she lives in the sea."

I was silent.

At this his face took a gentler expression. He looked at me as though something was on his mind, and going out to the entrance rock gazed at the external blue. Then returning into our twilight he said, "As a rule only good people see the Siren."

I made no comment. There was a pause, and he continued. "That is a very strange thing, and the priests do not know how to account for it; for she of course is wicked. Not only those who fast and go to Mass are in danger, but even those who are merely good in daily life. No one in the village had seen her for two generations. I am not surprised. We all cross ourselves before we enter the water, but it is unnecessary. Giuseppe, we thought, was safer than most. We loved him, and many of us he loved: but that is a different thing from being good."

I asked who Giuseppe was.

"That day—I was seventeen and my brother was

twenty and a great deal stronger than I was, and it was the year when the visitors, who have brought such prosperity and so many alterations into the village, first began to come. One English lady in particular, of very high birth, came, and has written a book about the place, and it was through her that the Improvement Syndicate was formed, which is about to connect the hotels with the station by a funicular railway."

"Don't tell me about that lady in here," I observed.

"That day we took her and her friends to see the grottoes. As we rowed close under the cliffs I put out my hand, as one does, and caught a little crab, and having pulled off its claws offered it as a curiosity. The ladies groaned, but a gentleman was pleased, and held out money. Being inexperienced, I refused it, saying that his pleasure was sufficient reward! Giuseppe, who was rowing behind, was very angry with me and reached out with his hand and hit me on the side of the mouth, so that a tooth cut my lip, and I bled. I tried to hit him back, but he always was too quick for me, and as I stretched round he kicked me under the armpit, so that for a moment I could not even row. There was a great noise among the ladies, and I heard afterward that they were planning to take me away from my brother and train me as a waiter. That, at all events, never came to pass.

"When we reached the grotto—not here, but a larger one—the gentleman was very anxious that one of us should dive for money, and the ladies consented, as they sometimes do. Giuseppe, who had discovered how much pleasure it gives foreigners to see us in the water, refused to dive for anything but silver, and the gentleman threw in a two-lira piece.

"Just before my brother sprang off he caught sight of me holding my bruise, and crying, for I could not help it.

He laughed and said, 'This time, at all events, I shall not see the Siren!' and went into the water without crossing himself. But he saw her."

He broke off and accepted a cigarette. I watched the golden entrance rock and the quivering walls and the magic water through which great bubbles constantly rose.

At last he dropped his hot ash into the ripples and turned his head away, and said, "He came up without the coin. We pulled him into the boat, and he was so large that he seemed to fill it, and so wet that we could not dress him. I have never seen a man so wet. I and the gentleman rowed back, and we covered Giuseppe with sacking and propped him up in the stern."

"He was drowned, then?" I murmured, supposing that to be the point.

"He was not," he cried angrily. "He saw the Siren. I told you."

I was silenced again.

"We put him to bed, though he was not ill. The doctor came, and took money, and the priest came and spattered him with holy water. But it was no good. He was too big—like a piece of the sea. He kissed the thumb-bones of San Biagio and they never dried till evening."

"What did he look like?" I ventured.

"Like anyone who has seen the Siren. If you have seen her 'often and often' how is it you do not know? Unhappy, unhappy because he knew everything. Every living thing made him unhappy because he knew it would die. And all he cared to do was sleep."

I bent over my notebook.

"He did no work, he forgot to eat, he forgot whether he had clothes on. All the work fell on me, and my sister had to go out to service. We tried to make him into a beggar, but he was too robust to inspire pity, and as for

an idiot, he had not the right look in his eyes. He would stand in the street looking at people, and the more he looked at them the more unhappy he became. When a child was born he would cover his face with his hand. If anyone was married—he was terrible then, and would frighten them as they came out of church. Who would have believed he would marry himself! I caused that, I was reading out of the paper how a girl at Ragusa had ‘gone mad through bathing in the sea.’ Giuseppe got up, and in a week he and that girl came in.

“He never told me anything, but it seems that he went straight to her house, broke into her room, and carried her off. She was the daughter of a rich mine-owner, so you may imagine our peril. Her father came down, with a clever lawyer, but they could do no more than I. They argued and they threatened, but at last they had to go back and we lost nothing—that is to say, no money. We took Giuseppe and Maria to the church and had them married. Ugh! that wedding! The priest made no jokes afterward, and coming out the children threw stones. . . . I think I would have died to make her happy; but as always happens, one could do nothing.”

“Were they unhappy together then?”

“They loved each other, but love is not happiness. We can all get love. Love is nothing. Love is everywhere since the death of Jesus Christ. I had two people to work for now, for she was like him in everything—one never knew which of them was speaking. I had to sell our own boat and work under the bad old man you have to-day. Worst of all people began to hate us. The children first—everything begins with them—and then the women and last of all the men. For the cause of every misfortune was—you will not betray me?”

I promised good faith, and immediately he burst into

the frantic blasphemy of one who has escaped from supervision, cursing the priests, who had ruined his life, he said. "Thus are we tricked!" was his cry, and he stood up and kicked at the azure ripples with his feet, till he had obscured them with a cloud of sand.

I too was moved. The story of Giuseppe, for all its absurdity and superstition, came nearer to reality than anything I had known before. I don't know why, but it filled me with desire to help others—the greatest of all our desires, I suppose, and the most fruitless. The desire soon passed.

"She was about to have a child. That was the end of everything. People said to me, 'When will your charming nephew be born? What a cheerful, attractive child he will be, with such a father and mother!' I kept my face steady and replied, 'I think he may be. Out of sadness shall come gladness'—it is one of our proverbs. And my answer frightened them very much, and they told the priests, who were frightened too. Then the whisper started that the child would be Antichrist. You need not be afraid; he was never born.

"An old witch began to prophesy, and no one stopped her. Giuseppe and the girl, she said, had silent devils, who could do little harm. But the child would always be speaking and laughing and perverting, and last of all he would go into the sea and fetch up the Siren into the air and all the world would see her and hear her sing. As soon as she sang, the Seven Vials would be opened and the Pope would die and Mongibello flame, and the veil of Santa Agata would be burned. Then the boy and the Siren would marry, and together they would rule the world, for ever and ever.

"The whole village was in tumult, and the hotel-keepers became alarmed, for the tourist season was just

beginning. They met together and decided that Giuseppe and the girl must be sent inland until the child was born, and they subscribed the money. The night before they were to start there was a full moon and wind from the east, and all along the coast the sea shot up over the cliffs in silver clouds. It was a wonderful sight, and Maria said she must see it once more.

"‘Do not go,’ I said. ‘I saw the priest go by, and someone with him. And the hotel-keepers do not like you to be seen, and if we displease them also we shall starve.’

"‘I want to go,’ she replied. ‘The sea is stormy, and I may never feel it again.’

"‘No, he is right,’ said Giuseppe. ‘Do not go—or let one of us go with you.’

"‘I want to go alone,’ she said; and she went alone.

"I tied up their luggage in a piece of cloth, and then I was so unhappy at thinking I should lose them that I went and sat down by my brother and put my arm round his neck, and he put his arm round me, which he had not done for more than a year, and we remained thus I don’t remember how long.

"Suddenly the door flew open and moonlight and wind came in together, and a child’s voice said laughing, ‘They have pushed her over the cliffs into the sea.’

"I stepped to the drawer where I keep my knives.

"‘Sit down again,’ said Giuseppe—Giuseppe of all people! ‘If she is dead, why should others die too?’

"‘I guess who it is,’ I cried, ‘and I will kill him.’

"I was almost out of the door, but he tripped me up and, kneeling upon me, took hold of both my hands and sprained my wrists; first my right one, then my left. No one but Giuseppe would have thought of such a thing. It hurt more than you would suppose, and I fainted. When I woke up, he was gone, and I never saw him again."

But Giuseppe disgusted me.

"I told you he was wicked," he said. "No one would have expected him to see the Siren."

"How do you know he did see her?"

"Because he did not see her 'often and often,' but once."

"Why do you love him if he is wicked?"

He laughed for the first time. That was his only reply.

"Is that the end?" I asked.

"I never killed her murderer, for by the time my wrists were well he was in America; and one cannot kill a priest. As for Giuseppe, he went all over the world too, looking for someone else who had seen the Siren—either a man, or, better still, a woman, for then the child might still have been born. At last he came to Liverpool—is the district probable?—and there he began to cough, and spat blood until he died.

"I do not suppose there is anyone living now who has seen her. There has seldom been more than one in a generation, and never in my life will there be both a man and a woman from whom that child can be born, who will fetch up the Siren from the sea, and destroy silence, and save the world!"

"Save the world?" I cried. "Did the prophecy end like that?"

He leaned back against the rock, breathing deep. Through all the blue-green reflections I saw him colour. I heard him say: "Silence and loneliness cannot last for ever. It may be a hundred or a thousand years, but the sea lasts longer, and she shall come out of it and sing." I would have asked him more, but at that moment the whole cave darkened, and there rode in through its narrow entrance the returning boat.

L. P. HARTLEY

THE ISLAND

How well I remembered the summer aspect of Mrs. Santander's island, and the gratefully deciduous trees among the pines of that countryside coming down to the water's edge and over it! How their foliage, sloping to a shallow dome, sucked in the sunlight, giving it back all grey and green! The sea, tossing and glancing, refracted the light from a million spumy points; the tawny sand glared, a monochrome unmitigated by shades; and the cliffs, always bare, seemed to have achieved an unparalleled nudity, every speck on their brown flanks clamouring for recognition.

Now every detail was blurred or lost. In the insufficient, ill-distributed November twilight the island itself was invisible. Forms and outlines survive but indistinctly in the memory; it was hard to believe that the spit of shingle on which I stood was the last bulwark of that huge discursive land-locked harbour, within whose meagre mouth Mrs. Santander's sea-borne territory seemed to ride at anchor. In the summer I pictured it as some crustacean, swallowed by an ill-turned starfish, but unassimilated. How easy it had been to reach it in Mrs. Santander's gay plunging motor-boat! And how inaccessible it seemed now, with the motor-boat fallen, as she



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L. P. HARTLEY

had written to tell me, into war-time disuse, with a sea running high and so dark that, save for the transparent but scarcely luminous wave-tips, it looked like an agitated solid. The howling of the wind, and the oilskins in which he was encased, made it hard to attract the ferryman's attention. I shouted to him: "Can you take me over to the island?"

"No I can't," said the ferryman, and pointed to the tumultuous waves in the harbour.

"What are you here for?" I bawled. "I tell you I must get across; I have to go back to France to-morrow."

In such circumstances it was impossible to argue without heat. The ferryman turned, relenting a little. He asked querulously in the tone of one who must raise a difficulty at any cost: "What if we both get drowned?"

What a fantastic objection! "Nonsense," I said. "There's no sea to speak of; anyhow, I'll make it worth your while."

The ferryman grunted at my unintentional pleasantry. Then, as the landing-stage was submerged by the exceptionally high tide, he carried me on his back to the boat, my feet trailing in the water. The man lurched at every step, for I was considerably heavier than he; but at last, waist-deep in water, he reached the boat and turned sideways for me to embark. How uncomfortable the whole business was. Why couldn't Mrs. Santander spend November in London like other people? Why was I so infatuated as to follow her here on the last night of my leave when I might have been lolling in the stalls of a theatre? The craft was behaving oddly, rolling so much that at every other stroke one of the boatman's attenuated seafaring oars would be left high and dry. Once, when we happened to be level with each other, I asked him the reason of Mrs. Santander's seclusion. At the top of his

voice he replied: "Why, they do say she be love-sick. Look out!" he added, for we had reached the end of our short passage and were "standing by" in the surf, a few yards from the shore, waiting for an "easy" in the succession of breakers. But the ferryman misjudged it. Just as the keel touched the steep shingle bank, a wave caught the boat, twisted it round and half over, and I lost my seat and rolled about in the bottom of the boat, getting very wet.

How dark it was among the trees. Acute physical discomfort had almost made me forget Mrs. Santander. But as I stumbled up the grassy slope I longed to see her.

She was not in the hall to welcome me. The butler, discreetly noticing my condition, said: "We will see about your things, sir." I was thankful to take them off, and I flung them about the floor of my bedroom—that huge apartment that would have been square but for the bow-window built on to the end. The wind tore at this window, threatening to drive it in; but not a curtain moved. Soundlessness, I remembered, was characteristic of the house. Indeed, I believed you might have screamed yourself hoarse in that room and not have been heard in the adjoining bathroom. Thither I hastened and wallowed long and luxuriously in the marble bath; deliberately I splashed the water over the side, simply to see it collected and marshalled away down the little grooves that unerringly received it. When I emerged, swathed in hot towels, I found my clothes already dried and pressed. Wonderful household. A feeling of unspeakable well-being descended upon me as, five minutes before dinner-time, I entered the drawing-room. It was empty. What pains Mrs. Santander must be bestowing on her toilette! Was it becoming her chief asset? I wondered. Perish the thought! She had a hundred charms of movement,

voice and expression, and yet she defied analysis. She was simply irresistible! How Santander, her impossible husband, could have retired to South America to nurse an injured pride, or as he doubtless called it, an injured honour, passed my comprehension. She had an art to make the most commonplace subject engaging. I remembered having once admired the lighting of the house. I had an odd fancy that it had a quality not found elsewhere, a kind of whiteness, a power of suggesting silence. It helped to give her house its peculiar hush. "Yes," she had said, "and it's all so simple; the sea makes it, just by going in and out!" A silly phrase, but her intonation made it linger in the memory like a charm.

I sat at the piano and played. There were some songs on the music-rest—Wolf, full of strange chords and accidentals so that I couldn't be sure I was right. But they interested me; and I felt so happy that I failed to notice how the time was drawing on—eight o'clock, and dinner should have been at a quarter to. Growing a little restless, I rose and walked up and down the room. One corner of it was in shadow, so I turned on all the lights. I had found it irritating to watch the regular expansion and shrinkage of my shadow. Now I could see everything; but I still felt constrained, sealed up in that admirable room. It was always a shortcoming of mine not to be able to wait patiently. So I wandered into the dining-room and almost thought—such is the power of overstrung anticipation—that I saw Mrs. Santander sitting at the head of the oval table. But it was only an effect of the candle-light. The two places were laid, hers and mine; the glasses with the twisty stems were there, such a number of glasses for the two of us! Suddenly I remembered I was smoking and, taking an almond, I left the room to its four candles. I peeped inside the

library; it was in darkness, and I realized, as I fumbled for the switch without being able to find it, that I was growing nervous. How ridiculous! Of course, Mrs. Santander wouldn't be in the library and in the dark. Abandoning the search for the switch, I returned to the drawing-room.

I vaguely expected to find it altered, and yet I had ceased to expect to see Mrs. Santander appear at any moment. That always happens when one waits for a person who doesn't come. But there *was* an alteration—in me. I couldn't find any satisfaction in struggling with Wolf; the music had lost its hold. So I drew a chair up to the china-cabinet; it had always charmed me with its figures of Chinamen, those white figures, conventional and stiff, but so smooth and luminous and significant. I found myself wondering, as often before, whether the ferocious pleasure in their expressions was really the Oriental artist's conception of unqualified good humour, or whether they were not, after all, rather cruel people. And this disquieting topic aroused others that I had tried successfully to repress: the exact connotation of my staying in the house as Mrs. Santander's guest, an unsporting little mouse playing when the cat was so undeniably, so effectually away. To ease myself of these obstinate questionings, I leant forward to open the door of the cabinet, intending to distract myself by taking one of the figures into my hand. Suddenly I heard a sound and looked up. A man was standing in the middle of the room.

"I'm afraid the cabinet's locked," he said.

In spite of my bewilderment, something in his appearance struck me as odd: he was wearing a hat. It was a grey felt hat, and he had an overcoat that was grey too.

"I hope you don't take me for a burglar," I said, trying to laugh.

"Oh, no," he replied, "not that." I thought his eyes were smiling but his mouth was shadowed by a dark moustache. He was a handsome man. Something in his face struck me as familiar; but it was not an unusual type and I might easily have been mistaken.

In the hurry of getting up I knocked over a set of fire-irons—the cabinet flanked the fireplace—and there was a tremendous clatter. It alarmed and then revived me. But I had a curious feeling of defencelessness as I stooped down to pick the fire-irons up, and it was difficult to fix them into their absurd sockets. The man in grey watched my operations without moving. I began to resent his presence. Presently he moved and stood with his back to the fire, stretching out his fingers to the warmth.

"We haven't been introduced," I said.

"No," he replied, "we haven't."

Then, while I was growing troubled and exasperated by his behaviour, he offered an explanation. "I'm the engineer Mrs. Santander calls in now and then to superintend her electric plant. That's how I know my way about. She's so inventive, and she doesn't like to take risks." He volunteered this. "And I came in here in case any of the fittings needed adjustments. I see they don't."

"No," I said, secretly reassured by the stranger's account of himself; "but I wish—of course, I speak without Mrs. Santander's authority—I wish you'd have a look at the switches in the library. They're damned inconvenient." I was so pleased with myself for having compassed the expletive that I scarcely noticed how the engineer's fingers, still avid of warmth, suddenly became rigid.

"Oh, you've been in the library, have you?" he said.

I replied that I had got no farther than the door.

"But if you can wait," I added politely to this superior mechanic who liked to style himself an engineer, "Mrs. Santander will be here in a moment."

"You're expecting her?" asked the mechanic.

"I'm staying in the house," I replied stiffly. The man was silent for several moments. I noticed the refinement in his face, the good cut of his clothes. I pondered upon the physical disability that made it impossible for him to join the Army.

"She makes you comfortable here?" he asked; and a physical disturbance, sneezing or coughing, I supposed, seized him, for he took out his handkerchief and turned from me with all the instinct of good breeding. But I felt that the question was one his station scarcely entitled him to make, and ignored it. He recovered himself.

"I'm afraid I can't wait," he said. "I must be going home. The wind is dropping. By the way," he added, "we have a connection in London. I think I may say it's a good firm. If ever you want an electric plant installed! I left a card somewhere." He searched for it vainly. "Never mind," he said, with his hand on the door, "Mrs. Santander will give you all particulars." Indulgently I waved my hand, and he was gone.

A moment later it occurred to me that he wouldn't be able to cross to the mainland without notifying the ferryman. I rang the bell. The butler appeared. "Mrs. Santander is very late, sir," he said.

"Yes," I replied, momentarily dismissing the question. "But there's a man, a mechanic or something—you probably know." The butler looked blank. "Anyhow," I said, "a man has been here attending to the lighting; he wants to go home; would you telephone the boatman to come and fetch him away?"

When the butler had gone to execute my order, my

former discomfort and unease returned. The adventure with the engineer had diverted my thoughts from Mrs. Santander. Why didn't she come? Perhaps she had fallen asleep, dressing. It happened to women when they were having their hair brushed. Gertrude was imperious and difficult; her maid might be afraid to wake her. Then I remembered her saying in her letter, "I shall be an awful fright because I've had to give my maid the sack." It was funny how the colloquialisms jarred when you saw them in black and white; it was different when she was speaking. Ah, just to hear her voice! Of course, the loss of her maid would hinder her, and account for some delay. Lucky maid, I mused confusedly, to have her hair in your hands! Her image was all before me as I walked aimlessly about the room. Half tranced with the delight of that evocation, I stopped in front of a great bowl, ornamented with dragons, that stood on the piano. Half an hour ago I had studied its interior that depicted terracotta fish with magenta fins swimming among conventional weeds. My glance idly sought the pattern again. It was partially covered by a little slip of paper. Ah! the engineer's card! His London connection! Amusedly I turned it over to read the engineer's name.

Mr. Maurice Santander

I started violently, the more that at the same moment there came a knock at the door. It was only the butler; but I was so bewildered I scarcely recognized him. Too well-trained perhaps to appear to notice my distress, he delivered himself almost in a speech. "We can't find any trace of the person you spoke of, sir. The ferryman's come across and he says there's no one at the landing-stage."

"The gentleman," I said, "has left this," and I thrust the card into the butlers hand.

"Why, that must be Mr. Santander!" the servant of Mr. Santander's wife at last brought out.

"Yes," I replied, "and I think perhaps as it's getting late, we ought to try and find Mrs. Santander. The dinner will be quite spoiled."

Telling the butler to wait and not to alarm the servants, I went alone to Gertrude's room. From the end of a long passage I saw the door standing partly open; I saw, too, that the room was in darkness. There was nothing strange in that I told myself; but it would be methodical, it would save time, to examine the intervening rooms first. Examine! What a misleading word. I banished it, and "search" came into my mind. I rejected that too. As I explored the shuttered silences I tried to find a formula that would amuse Gertrude, some facetious understatements of my agitated quest. "A little tour of inspection"—she would like that. I could almost hear her say: "So you expected to find me under a sofa!" I wouldn't tell her that I had looked under the sofas, unless to make a joke of it: something about dust left by the housemaid. I rose to my knees, spreading my hands out in the white glow. Not a speck. But wasn't conversation—conversation with Gertrude—made up of little half-truths, small forays into fiction? With my hand on the door—it was of the last room and led on to the landing—I rehearsed the pleasantries aloud: "During the course of a little tour of inspection, Gertrude, I went from one dust-heap to another, from dust unto dust I might almost say. . . ." This time I must overcome my unaccountable reluctance to enter her room. Screwing up my courage, I stepped into the passage, but for all my resolution I got no farther.

The door still stood as I had first seen it—half open; but there was a light in the room—a rather subdued light, possibly from the standard-lamp by the bed. I knocked and called “Gertrude!” and when there was no reply I pushed open the door. It moved from right to left so as not to expose the bulk of the room, which lay on the left side. It seemed a long time before I was fairly in.

I saw the embers of the fire, the pale troubled lights of the mirror, and, vivid in the pool of light by the bed, a note. It said: “Forgive me, dearest, I have had to go. I can’t explain why, but we shall meet some time. All my love, G.” There was no envelope, no direction, but the handwriting was hers and the informality characteristic of her. It was odd that the characters, shaky as they were, did not seem to have been written in haste. I was trying to account for this, trying to stem, by an act of concentration, the tide of disappointment that was sweeping over me, when a sudden metallic whirr sounded in my ear. It was the telephone—the small subsidiary telephone that communicated with the servants’ quarters. “It will save their steps,” she had said, when I urged her to have it put in; and I remembered my pleasure in this evidence of consideration, for my own motives had been founded in convenience and even in prudence. Now I loathed the black shiny thing that buzzed so raucously and never moved. And what could the servants have to say to me except that Mr. Santander had—well, gone. What else was there for him to do? The instrument rang again and I took up the receiver.

“Yes?”

“Please, sir, dinner is served.”

“Dinner!” I echoed. It was nearly ten, but I had forgotten about that much-postponed meal.

“Yes, sir. Didn’t you give orders to have it ready im-

mediately? For two, I think you said, sir." The voice sounded matter-of-fact enough, but in my bewilderment I nearly lost all sense of what I was doing. At last I managed to murmur in a voice that might have been anybody's: "Yes, of course, for two."

On second thoughts, I left the telephone disconnected. I felt just then that I couldn't bear another summons. And, though my course was clear, I did not know what to do next; my will had nothing but confusion to work with. In the dark perhaps, I might collect myself. But it didn't occur to me to turn out the light; instead, I parted the heavy curtains that shut off the huge bow-window and drew them behind me. The rain was driving furiously against the double casements, but not a sound vouched for its energy. A moon shone at intervals and by the light of one gleam, brighter than the rest, I saw a scrap of paper, crushed up, lying in a corner. I smoothed it out, glad to have employment for my fingers, but darkness descended on the alcove again and I had to return to the room. In spite of its crumpled condition I made out the note—easily, indeed, for it was a copy of the one I had just read. Or perhaps the original; but why should the same words have been written twice and even three times, not more plainly, for Gertrude never tried to write plainly, but with a deliberate illegibility?

There was only one other person besides Gertrude, I thought, while I stuffed the cartridges into my revolver, who could have written that note, and he was waiting for me downstairs. How would he look, how would he explain himself? This question occupied me to the exclusion of a more natural curiosity—*my* appearance, *my* explanation. They would have to be of the abruptest. Perhaps, indeed, they wouldn't be needed. There were a dozen corners, a dozen points of vantage all well known

to Mr. Santander between me and the dining-room door. It came to me inconsequently that the crack of a shot in that house would make no more noise than the splintering of a toilet-glass on my washing-stand. And Mr. Santander, well versed no doubt in South American revolutions, affrays, and shootings-up, would be an adept in the guerilla warfare to which military service hadn't accustomed me. Wouldn't it be wiser, I thought irresolutely contemplating the absurd bulge in my dinner jacket, to leave him to his undisputed mastery of the situation, and not put it to the proof? It was not like cutting an ordinary engagement. A knock on the door interrupted my confused consideration of social solecisms.

"Mr. Santander told me to tell you he is quite ready," the butler said. Through his manifest uneasiness I detected a hint of disapproval. He looked at me askance; he had gone over. But couldn't he be put to some use? I had an idea.

"Perhaps you would announce me," I said. He couldn't very well refuse, and piloted by him I should have a better chance in the passages and an entry valuably disconcerting. "I'm not personally known to Mr. Santander," I explained. "It would save some little awkwardness."

Close upon the heels of my human shield I threaded the passages. Their bright emptiness reassured me; it was inconceivable, I felt, after several safely negotiated turns, that anything sinister could lurk behind those politely rounded corners—Gertrude had had their angularities, smoothed into curves; it would be so terrible, she said, if going to bed one stumbled (one easily might) and fell against an *edge*! But innocuous as they were, I preferred to avoid them. The short cut through the library would thus serve a double purpose, for it would let us in from an unexpected quarter, from that end

of the library, in fact, where the large window, so perilous-looking—really so secure on its struts and stays—perched over the roaring sea.

"This is the quickest way," I said to the butler, pointing to the library door. He turned the handle. "It's locked, sir."

"Oh, well."

We had reached the dining-room at last. The butler paused with his hand on the knob as though by the mere sense of touch he could tell whether he were to be again denied admittance. Or perhaps he was listening or just thinking. The next thing I knew was that he had called out my name and I was standing in the room. Then I heard Mr. Santander's voice. "You can go, Collins." The door shut.

My host didn't turn round at once. All I could make out, in the big dim room lighted only by its four candles and the discreet footlights of dusky pictures, was his back and his face—the eyes and forehead—reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece. The same mirror showed my face too, low down on the right-hand side, curiously unrelated. His arms were stretched along the mantelpiece and he was stirring the fire with his foot. Suddenly he turned and faced me.

"Oh, you're there," he said. "I'm so sorry."

We moved to the table and sat down. There was nothing to eat.

I fell to studying his appearance. Every line of his dinner-jacket, every fold in his soft shirt, I knew by heart; I seemed always to have known them.

"What are you waiting for?" he suddenly demanded rather loudly. "Collins!" he called. "Collins!" His voice reverberated through the room, but no one came. "How stupid of me," he muttered; "of course, I must

ring." Oddly enough he seemed to look at me for confirmation. I nodded. Collins appeared, and the meal began.

Its regular sequence soothed him, for presently he said: "You must forgive my being so distraught. I've had rather a tiring journey—come from a distance, as they say. South America, in fact." He drank some wine reflectively. "I had one or two things to settle before . . . before joining the Army. Now I don't think it will be necessary."

"Necessary to settle them?" I said.

"No," he replied. "I have settled them."

"You mean that you will claim exemption as an American citizen?"

Again Mr. Santander shook his head. "It would be a reason, wouldn't it? But I hadn't thought of that."

Instinct urged me to let so delicate a topic drop; but my nerves were fearful of a return to silence. There seemed so little, of all that we had in common, to draw upon for conversation.

"You suffer from bad health, perhaps?" I suggested. But he demurred again.

"Even Gertrude didn't complain of my health," he said, adding quickly, as though to smother the sound of her name: "But you're not drinking."

"I don't think I will," I stammered. I had meant to say I was a teetotaler.

My host seemed surprised. "And yet Gertrude had a long bill at her wine merchant's," he commented, half to himself.

I echoed it involuntarily: "Had?"

"Oh," he said, "it's been paid. That's partly," he explained, "why I came home—to pay."

I felt I couldn't let this pass.

"Mr. Santander," I said, "there's a great deal in your behaviour that I don't begin (is that good American?) to understand."

"No?" he murmured, looking straight in front of him.

"But," I proceeded, as truculently as I could, "I want you to realize——"

He cut me short. "Don't suppose," he said, "that I attribute all my wife's expenditure to you."

I found myself trying to defend her. "Of course," I said, "she has the house to keep up; it's not run for a mere song, a house like this." And with my arm I tried to indicate to Mr. Santander the costly immensity of his domain. "You wouldn't like her to live in a pigsty, would you? And there's the sea to keep out—why, a night like this must do pounds' worth of damage!"

"You are right," he said with a strange look; "you even underestimate the damage it has done."

Of course, I couldn't fail to catch his meaning. He meant the havoc wrought in his affections. They had been strong, report said—strong enough for her neglect of them to make him leave the country. They weren't expressed in half-measures, I thought, looking at him with a new sensation. He must have behaved with the high-hand, when he arrived. How he must have steeled himself to drive her out of the house, that stormy night, ignoring her piteous protestations, her turns and twists which I had never been able to ignore! She was never so alluring, never so fertile in emotional appeals, as when she knew she was in for a scolding. I could hear her say, "But, Maurice, however much you hate me, you couldn't really want me to get *wet*!" and his reply: "Get out of this house, and don't come back till I send for you. As for your lover, leave me to look after him." He was looking after me, and soon, no doubt, he would send for

her. And for her sake, since he had really returned to take part in her life, I couldn't desire this estrangement. Couldn't I even bridge it over, bring it to a close? *Beati pacifici*. Well, I would be a peace-maker too.

Confident that my noble impulses must have communicated themselves to my host, I looked up from my plate and searched his face for signs of abating rigour. I was disappointed. But should I forgo or even postpone my atonement because he was stiff-necked? Only it was difficult to begin. At last I ventured.

"Gertrude is really very fond of you, you know."

Dessert had been reached, and I, in token of amity and good-will, had helped myself to a glass of port wine.

For answer he fairly glared at me. "Fond of me!" he shouted.

I was determined not to be browbeaten out of my kind offices.

"That's what I said; she has a great heart."

"If you mean," he replied, returning to his former tone, "that it has ample accommodation!—but your recommendations come too late; I have delegated her affections."

"To me?" I asked, involuntarily.

He shook his head. "And in any case, why to you?"

"Because I——"

"Oh, no," he exclaimed passionately. "Did she deceive you—has she deceived you into believing *that*—that *you* are the alternative to *me*? You aren't unique—you have your reduplications, scores of them!"

My head swam, but he went on, enjoying his triumph. "Why, no one ever told me about *you*! She herself only mentioned you once. You are the least—the least of all her lovers!" His voice dropped. "Otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"Where should I be?" I fatuously asked. But he went on without regarding me.

"But I remember this house when its silence, its comfort, its isolation, its uniqueness were for us, Gertrude and me and . . . and for the people we invited. But we didn't ask many—we preferred to be alone. And I thought at first she was alone," he wound up, "when I found her this evening."

"Then why," I asked, "did you send her away and not me?"

"Ah," he replied with an accent of finality, "I wanted you."

While he spoke he was cracking a nut with his fingers and it must have had sharp edges, for he stopped, wincing, and held the finger to his mouth.

"I've hurt my nail," he said. "See?"

He pushed his hand towards me over the polished table. I watched it, fascinated, thinking it would stop; but still it came on, his body following, until, if I hadn't drawn back it would have touched me, while his chin dropped to within an inch of the table, and one side of his face was pillowed against his upper arm.

"It's a handicap, isn't it?" he said, watching me from under his brows.

"Indeed it is," I replied; for the fine acorn-shaped nail was terribly torn, a jagged rent revealing the quick, moist and gelatinous. "How did you manage to do that?" I went on, trying not to look at the mutilation which he still held before my eyes.

"Do you really want to know how I did it?" he asked. He hadn't moved, and his question, in its awkward irregular delivery, seemed to reflect the sprawled unnatural position of his body.

"Do tell me," I said, and added, nervously jocular,

"But first let me guess. Perhaps you met with an accident in the course of your professional activities, when you were mending the lights, I mean, in the library."

At that he jumped to his feet. "You're very warm," he said, "you almost burn. But come into the library with me, and I'll tell you."

I prepared to follow him.

But unaccountably he lingered, walked up and down a little, went to the fireplace and again (it was evidently a favourite relaxation) gently kicked the coals. Then he went to the library door, meaning apparently to open it, but he changed his mind and instead turned on the big lights of the dining-room. "Let's see what it's really like," he said. "I hate this half-light." The sudden illumination laid bare that great rich still room, so secure, so assured, so content. My host stood looking at it. He was fidgeting with his dinner-jacket and had so little self-control that, at every brush of the material with his damaged finger, he whimpered like a child. His face, now that I saw it fairly again, was twisted and disfigured with misery. There wasn't one imaginable quality that he shared with his sumptuous possessions.

In the library darkness was absolute. My host preceded me, and in a moment I had lost all sense of even our relative positions. I backed against the wall, and by luck my groping fingers felt the switch. But its futile click only emphasized the darkness. I began to feel frightened, with an acute immediate alarm very different from my earlier apprehensions and forebodings. To add to my uneasiness my ears began to detect a sound, a small irregular sound; it might have been water dripping, yet it seemed too definitely consonantal for that; it was more like an inhuman whisper. "Speak up," I cried, "if you're talking to me!" But it had no more effect, my petulant

outcry, than if it had fallen on the ears of the dead. The disquieting noise persisted, but another note had crept into it—a soft labial sound, like the licking of lips. It wasn't intelligible, it wasn't even articulate, yet I felt that if I listened longer it would become both. I couldn't bear the secret colloquy; and though it seemed to be taking place all round me, I made a rush into what I took to be the middle of the room. I didn't get very far, however. A chair sent me sprawling, and when I picked myself up it was to the accompaniment of a more familiar sound. The curtains were being drawn apart and the moonlight, struggling in, showed me shapes of furniture and my own position, a few feet from the door. It showed me something else, too.

How could my host be drawing the curtains when I could see him lounging, relaxed and careless, in an arm-chair that, from its position by the wall, missed the moon's directer ray? I strained my eyes. Very relaxed, very careless he must be, after what had passed between us, to stare at me so composedly over his shoulder, no, more than that, over his very back! He faced me, though his shoulder, oddly enough, was turned away. Perhaps he had practised it—a contortionist's trick to bewilder his friends. Suddenly I heard his voice, not from the arm-chair at all but from the window.

"Do you know now?"

"What?" I said.

"How I hurt my finger?"

"No," I cried untruthfully, for that very moment all my fears told me.

"I did it strangling my wife!"

I rushed towards the window, only to be driven back by what seemed a solid body of mingled sleet and wind. I heard the creak of the great casement before it whirled

outwards, crashing against the mullion and shattering the glass. But though I fought my way to the opening I wasn't quick enough. Sixty feet below the eroding sea sucked, spouted and roared. Out of it jags of rock seemed to rise, float for a moment and then be dragged under the foam. Time after time great arcs of spray sprang hissing from the sea, lifted themselves to the window as though impelled by an insatiable curiosity, condensed and fell away. The drops were bitter on my lips. Soaked to the skin and stiff with cold, I turned to the room. The heavy brocade curtains flapped madly or rose and streamed level with the ceiling, and through the general uproar I could distinguish separate sounds, the clattering fall of small objects and the banging and scraping of pictures against the walls, the whole weather-proof, soundproof house seemed to be falling to ruin, to be given up to darkness and furies. . . . and to me. But not wholly, not unreservedly, to me. Mrs. Santander was still at her place in the easy chair.

RICHARD HUGHES

THE GHOST

HE killed me quite easily by bumping my head on the cobbles. *Bang!* Lord, what a fool I was! All my hate went out with that first bang: a fool to have kicked up that fuss just because I had found him with another woman. And now he was doing this to me—*bang!* That was the second one, and with it *everything* went out.

My sleek young soul must have glistened somewhat in the moonlight, for I saw him look up from the body in a fixed sort of way. That gave me an idea: I would haunt him. All my life I had been scared of ghosts: now I was one myself I would get a bit of my own back. *He* never was; he said there weren't such things as ghosts. Oh, weren't there! I'd soon teach him. John stood up, still staring in front of him: I could see him plainly: gradually all my hate came back. I thrust my face close up against his: but he didn't seem to see it, he just stared. Then he began to walk forward, as if to walk through me: and I was afraid. Silly, for me—a spirit—to be afraid of his solid flesh; but there you are, fear doesn't act as you would expect, ever: and I gave back before him, then slipped aside to let him pass. Almost he was lost in the street-shadows before I recovered myself and followed him.



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RICHARD HUGHES

And yet I don't think he could have given me the slip : there was still something between us that drew me to him—willy-nilly, you might say, I followed him up High Street, and down Lily Lane.

Lily Lane was all shadows ; but yet I could still see him as clear as if it was daylight. Then my courage came back to me : I quickened my pace till I was ahead of him—turned round, flapping my hands and making a moaning sort of noise like the ghosts did I'd read of. He began to smile a little, in a sort of satisfied way : but yet he didn't seem properly to see me. Could it be that his hard disbelief in ghosts made him so that he *couldn't see me*? "*Hoo!*" I whistled through my small teeth. "*Hoo! Murderer! Murderer!*"—Someone flung up a top window. "Who's that?" she called. "What's the matter?" So other people could hear, at any rate. But I kept silent ; I wouldn't give him away—not yet. And all the time he walked straight forward, smiling to himself. He never had any conscience, I said to myself. There he is with new murder on his mind, smiling as easy as if it was nothing. But there was a sort of hard look about him, *all* the same.

It was odd, my being a ghost so suddenly, when ten minutes ago I was a living woman : and now, walking on air, with the wind clear and wet between my shoulder-blades. Ha-ha! I gave a regular shriek and a screech of laughter, it all felt so funny . . . surely John must have heard *that* : but no, he just turned the corner into Pole Street.

All along Pole Street the plane-trees were shedding their leaves, and then I knew what I would do. I made those dead leaves rise up on their thin edges, as if the wind was doing it. All along Pole Street they followed him, pattering on the roadway with their five dry fingers.

But John just stirred among them with his feet, and went on, and I followed him : for, as I said, there was still some tie between us that drew me.

Once only he turned and seemed to see me ; there was a sort of recognition in his face : but no fear, only triumph. "You're glad you've killed me," thought I, "but I'll make you sorry!"

And then all at once the fit left me. A nice sort of Christian, I, scarcely fifteen minutes dead and still thinking of revenge, instead of preparing to meet my Lord! Some sort of voice in me seemed to say: "Leave him, Millie, leave him alone *before it is too late!*" Too late? Surely I could leave him when I wanted to? Ghosts haunt as they like, don't they? I'd make just one more attempt at terrifying him, then I'd give it up and think about going to heaven.

He stopped and turned, and faced me full.

I pointed at him with both my hands.

"John!" I cried, "John! It's all very well for you to stand there and smile, and stare with your great fish-eyes and think you've won, but you haven't! I'll do you, I'll finish you! I'll——"

I stopped and laughed a little. Windows shot up. "Who's that? What's the row?"—and so on. They had all heard: but he only turned and walked on.

"Leave him, Millie, before it is too late," the voice said.

So that's what the voice meant: leave him before I betrayed his secret and had the crime of revenge on my soul. Very well, I would: I'd leave him. I'd go straight to heaven before any accident happened. So I stretched up my two arms, and tried to float into the air, but at once some force seized me like a great gust, and I was swept away after him down the street. There was something stirring in me that still bound me to him.

Strange, that I should be so real to all those people that they thought me still a living woman, but he—who had most reason to fear me—why, it seemed doubtful whether he even saw me. And where was he going to, right up the desolate long length of Pole Street? He turned into Rope Street. I saw a blue lamp: that was the police station.

“Oh, Lord,” I thought, “I’ve done it! Oh, Lord, he’s going to give himself up.”

“You drove him to it,” the voice said. “You fool, did you think he didn’t see you? What did you expect? Did you think he’d shriek, and gibber with fear at you? Did you think your John was a coward? Now his death is on your head!”

“I didn’t do it, I didn’t!” I cried. “I never wished him any harm, never, not *really*! I wouldn’t hurt him, not for anything, I wouldn’t. Oh, John, don’t stare like that! There’s still time . . . time!”

And all this while he stood in the door, looking at me, while the policemen came out and stood round in a ring. He couldn’t escape now.

“Oh, John,” I sobbed, “forgive me! I didn’t mean to do it! It was jealousy, John, that did it . . . because I loved you.”

Still the police took no notice of him.

“That’s her,” said one of them in a husky voice. “Done it with a hammer, she done it . . . brained him. But Lord, isn’t her face ghastly? Haunted, like.”

“Look at her ’ead, poor girl. Looks as if she tried to do herself in with the ’ammer after.”

Then the sergeant stepped forward.

“Anything you say will be taken down as evidence against you.”

“John!” I cried softly, and held out my arms—for at last his face had softened.

"Holy Mary!" said one policeman, crossing himself.
"She's seeing him!"

"They'll not hang her," another whispered. "Did you notice her condition, poor girl?"



ALDOUS HUXLEY

LITTLE MEXICAN

THE shopkeeper called it, affectionately, a little Mexican; and little, for a Mexican, it may have been. But in this Europe of ours, where space is limited and the scale smaller, the little Mexican was portentous, a giant among hats. It hung there, in the centre of the hatter's window, a huge black aureole, fit for a king among devils. But no devil walked that morning through the streets of Ravenna: only the mildest of literary tourists. Those were the days when very large hats seemed in my eyes very desirable, and it was on my head, all unworthy, that the aureole of darkness was destined to descend. On my head; for at the first sight of the hat, I had run into the shop, tried it on, found the size correct, and bought it, without bargaining, at a foreigner's price. I left the shop with the little Mexican on my head, and my shadow on the pavements of Ravenna was like the shadow of an umbrella pine.

The little Mexican is very old now, and moth-eaten and green; but I still preserve it. Occasionally, for old association's sake, I even wear it. Dear Mexican! it represents for me a whole epoch of my life. It stands for emancipation and the first years at the University. It symbolizes the discovery of how many new things,

new ideas, new sensations!—of French literature, of alcohol, of modern painting, of Nietzsche, of love, of metaphysics, of Mallarmé, of syndicalism, and of goodness knows what else. But, above all, I prize it because it reminds me of my first discovery of Italy. It re-evokes for me—my little Mexican—all the thrills and astonishments and virgin raptures of that first Italian tour in the early autumn of 1912. Urbino, Rimini, Ravenna, Ferrara, Modena, Mantua, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Venice—my first impressions of all these fabulous names lie, like a hatful of jewels, in the crown of the little Mexican. Shall I ever have the heart to throw it away?

And then, of course, there is Tirabassi. Without the little Mexican I should never have made Tirabassi's acquaintance. He would never have taken me, in my small unemphatic English hat, for a painter. And I should never, in consequence, have seen the frescoes, never have talked with the old Count, never heard of the Colombella. Never . . . When I think of that, the little Mexican seems to me more than ever precious.

It was, of course, very typical of Tirabassi to suppose, from the size of my hat, that I must be a painter. He had a neat military mind that refused to accept the vague disorder of the world. He was for ever labelling and pigeon-holing and limiting his universe; and when the classified objects broke out of their pigeon-holes and tore the labels from off their necks, Tirabassi was puzzled and annoyed. In any case, it was obvious to him, from the first moment he saw me in the restaurant at Padua, that I must be a painter. All painters wear large black hats. I was wearing the little Mexican. *Ergo*, I was a painter. It was syllogistic, unescapable.

He sent the waiter to ask me whether I would do him the honour of taking coffee with him at his table. For

the first moment, I must confess, I was a little alarmed. This dashing young lieutenant of cavalry—what on earth could he want with me? The most absurd fancies filled my mind: I had committed, all unconsciously, some frightful solecism; I had trodden on the toes of the lieutenant's honour, and he was about to challenge me to a duel. The choice of weapons, I rapidly reflected, would be mine. But what—oh, what on earth should I choose? Swords? I had never learnt to fence. Pistols? I had once fired six shots at a bottle and missed it with every shot. Would there be time to write one or two letters, make some sort of a testament about my personal belongings? From this anguish of mind the waiter, returning a moment later with my fried octopus, delivered me. The Lieutenant Count, he explained in a whisper of confidence, had a villa on the Brenta, not far from Strà. A villa (he spread out his hands in a generous gesture) full of paintings—full, full, full! And he was anxious that I should see them, because he felt sure that I was interested in paintings. Oh, of course—I smiled rather foolishly, for the waiter seemed to expect some sort of confirmatory interpolation from me—I *was* interested in paintings; very much. In that case, said the waiter, the Count would be delighted to take me to see them. He left me, still puzzled, but vastly relieved. At any rate, I was not being called upon to make the very embarrassing choice between swords and pistols.

Surreptitiously, whenever he was not looking in my direction, I examined the Lieutenant Count. His appearance was not typically Italian. (But then, what is a typical Italian?) He was not, that is to say, blue-jowled, beardy-eyed, swarthy and aquiline. On the contrary, he had pale ginger hair, grey eyes, a snub nose, and a freckled complexion. I knew plenty of young English-

men who might have been Count Tirabassi's less vivacious brothers.

He received me, when the time came, with the most exquisite courtesy, apologizing for the unceremonious way in which he had made my acquaintance. "But as I felt sure," he said, "that you were interested in art, I thought you would forgive me for the sake of what I have to show you." I couldn't help wondering why the Count felt so certain about my interest in art. It was only later, when we left the restaurant together, that I understood; for as I put on my hat to go, he pointed with a smile at the little Mexican. "One can see," he said, "that you are a real artist." I was left at a loss, not knowing what to answer.

After we had exchanged the preliminary courtesies, the Lieutenant plunged at once—entirely for my benefit, I could see—into a conversation about art. "Nowadays," he said, "we Italians don't take enough interest in art. In a modern country, you see. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders, leaving the sentence unfinished. "But I don't think that's right. I adore art—simply adore it. When I see foreigners going round with their guidebooks, standing for half an hour in front of one picture, looking first at the book, then at the picture"—and here he gave the most brilliantly finished imitation of an Anglican clergyman conscientiously "doing" the Mantegna chapel: first a glance at the imaginary Baedeker held open in his two hands, then, with the movement of a chicken that drinks, a lifting of the face towards an imaginary fresco, a long stare between puckered eyelids, a falling-open of the mouth, and finally, a turning back of the eyes towards the inspired pages of Baedeker—"when I see them, I feel ashamed for us Italians." The Count spoke very earnestly—feeling, no doubt, that his talent for mimicry had

carried him a little too far. "And if they stand for half an hour looking at the thing, I go and stand there for an hour. That's the way to understand great art—the only way." He leaned back in his chair and sipped his coffee. "Unfortunately," he added after a moment, "one hasn't got much time."

I agreed with him. "When one can only get to Italy for a month at a stretch, like myself——"

"Ah, but if only I could travel about the world like you!" The Count sighed. "But here I am, cooped up in this wretched town. And when I think of the enormous capital that's hanging there on the walls of my house. . . ." He checked himself, shaking his head. Then, changing his tone, he began to tell me about his house on the Brenta. It sounded altogether too good to be true. Carpioni, yes—I could believe in frescoes by Carpioni; almost anyone might have those. But a hall by Veronese, but rooms by Tiepolo, all in the same house—that sounded incredible. I could not help believing that the Count's enthusiasm for art had carried him away. But, in any case, to-morrow I should be able to judge for myself; the Count had invited me to lunch with him.

We left the restaurant. Still embarrassed by the Count's references to my little Mexican, I walked by his side in silence up the arcaded street.

"I am going to introduce you to my father," said the Count. "He, too, adores the arts."

More than ever I felt myself a swindler. I had wriggled into the Count's confidence on false pretences; my hat was a lie. I felt that I ought to do something to clear up the misunderstanding. But the Count was so busy complaining to me about his father that I had no opportunity to put in my little explanation. I didn't listen very attentively, I confess, to what he was saying. In the course

of a year at Oxford I had heard so many young men complain of their fathers. Not enough money, too much interference—the story was a stale one. And at that time, moreover, I was taking a very high philosophical line about this sort of thing. I was pretending that people didn't interest me—only books, only ideas. What a fool one can make of oneself at that age!

"Eccoci!" said the Count. We halted in front of the Café Pedrochi. "He always comes here for his coffee."

And where else, indeed, should he come for his coffee? Who, in Padua, would go anywhere else?

We found him sitting out on the terrace at the farther end of the building. I had never, I thought, seen a jollier-looking old gentleman. The old Count had a red weather-beaten face, with white moustaches bristling gallantly upwards and a white imperial in the grand Risorgimento manner of Victor Emmanuel the Second. Under the white tufty eyebrows, and set in the midst of a webwork of fine wrinkles, the eyes were brown and bright like a robin's. His long nose looked, somehow, more practically useful than the ordinary human nose, as though made for fine judicial sniffing, for delicate burrowing and probing. Thick-set and strong, he sat there solidly in his chair, his knees apart, his hands clasped over the knob of his cane, carrying his paunch with dignity—nobly, I had almost said—before him. He was dressed all in white linen—for the weather was still very hot—and his wide grey hat was tilted rakishly forward over his left eye. It gave one a real satisfaction to look at him: he was so complete, so perfect in his kind.

The young Count introduced me. "This is an English gentleman. Signor . . . ?" He turned to me for the name.

"Oosselay," I said, having^f learnt by experience that

that was as near as any Italian could be expected to get to it.

"Signor Oosselay," the young Count continued, "is an artist."

"Well, not exactly an artist," I was beginning; but he would not let me make an end.

"He is also very much interested in ancient art," he continued. "To-morrow I am taking him to Dolo to see the frescoes. I know he will like them."

We sat down at the old Count's table; critically he looked at me and nodded. "*Benissimo*," he said; and then added, "let's hope you'll be able to do something to help us sell the things."

This was startling. I looked in some perplexity towards the young Count. He was frowning angrily at his father. The old gentleman had evidently said the wrong thing; he had spoken, I guessed, too soon. At any rate, he took his son's hint and glided off serenely on another track.

"The fervid phantasy of Tiepolo," he began rotundly, "the cool unimpassioned splendour of Veronese—at Dolo you will see them contrasted." I listened attentively, while the old gentleman thundered on in what was evidently a set speech. When it was over, the young Count got up; he had to be back at the barracks by half-past two. I, too, made as though to go; but the old man laid his hand on my arm. "Stay with me," he said. "I enjoy your conversation infinitely." And, as he himself had hardly ceased speaking for one moment since first I set eyes on him, I could well believe it. With the gesture of a lady lifting her skirts out of the mud (and those were the days when skirts still had to be lifted), the young Count picked up his trailing sabre and swaggered off, very military, very brilliant and glittering, like a soldier on the stage, into the sunlight, out of sight.

The old man's bird-bright eyes followed him as he went. "A good boy, Fabio," he said, turning back to me at last, "a good son!" He spoke affectionately; but there was a hint, I thought, in his smile, in the tone of his voice—a hint of amusement, of irony. It was as though he were adding, by implication, "But good boys, after all, are fools to be so good." I found myself, in spite of my affectation of detachment, extremely curious about this old gentleman. And he, for his part, was not the man to allow anyone in his company to remain for long in splendid isolation. He insisted on my taking an interest in his affairs. He told me all about them—or at any rate all about some of them—pouring out his confidences with an astonishing absence of reserve. Next to the intimate and trusted friend, the perfect stranger is the best of all possible confidants. There is no commercial traveller of moderately sympathetic appearance who has not, in the course of his days in the train, his evenings in the parlours of commercial hotels, been made the repository of a thousand intimate secrets. Even in England. And in Italy—goodness knows what commercial travellers get told in Italy! Even I, a foreigner, speaking the language badly, and not very skilful anyhow in conducting a conversation with strangers, have heard queer things in the second-class carriages of Italian trains. Here, too, on Pedrochi's terrace I was to hear queer things. A door was to be left ajar, and through the crack I was to have a peep at unfamiliar lives.

"What I should do without him," the old gentleman continued, "I really don't know. The way he manages the estate is simply wonderful." And he went rambling off into long digressions about the stupidity of peasants, the incompetence and dishonesty of bailiffs, the badness of the weather, the spread of 'phylloxera, the high price

of manure. The upshot of it all was that, since Fabio had taken over the estate, everything had gone well; even the weather had improved. "It's such a relief," the Count concluded, "to feel that I have someone in charge on whom I can rely—someone I can trust absolutely. It leaves me free to devote my mind to more important things."

I could not help wondering what the important things were; but it would have been impertinent, I felt, to ask. Instead, I put a more practical question. "But what will happen," I asked, "when your son's military duties take him away from Padua?"

The old Count gave me a wink and laid his forefinger very deliberately to the side of his long nose. The gesture was rich with significance. "They never will," he said. "It's all arranged. A little *combinazione*, you know. I have a friend in the Ministry. His military duties will always keep him in Padua." He winked again and smiled.

I could not help laughing, and the old Count joined in with a joyous "Ha-ha!" that was the expression of a profound satisfaction, that was, as it were, a burst of self-applause. He was evidently proud of his little *combinazione*. But he was prouder still of the other combination, about which he now confidentially leaned across the table to tell me. It was decidedly the subtler of the two.

"And it's not merely his military duties," he said, wagging at me the thick, yellow-nailed forefinger which he had laid against his nose—"it's not merely his military duties that'll keep the boy in Padua. It's his domestic duties. He's married. I married him." He leaned back in his chair and surveyed me, smiling. The little wrinkles round his eyes seemed to be alive. "That boy, I said to myself, must settle down. He must have a nest, or else

he'll fly away. He must have roots, or else he'll run. And his poor old father will be left in the lurch. He's young, I thought, but he must marry. He *must* marry. At once." And the old gentleman made great play with his forefinger. It was a long story. His old friend, the Avvocato Monaldeschi, had twelve children—three boys and nine girls. (And here there were digressions about the Avvocato and the size of good Catholic families.) The eldest girl was just the right age for Fabio. No money, of course; but a good girl and pretty, and very well brought up and religious. Religious—that was very important; for it was essential that Fabio should have a large family—to keep him more effectually rooted, the old Count explained—and with these modern young women brought up outside the Church one could never be certain of children. Yes, her religion was most important; he looked into that very carefully before selecting her. Well, the next thing, of course, was that Fabio should be induced to select her. It had been a matter of bringing the horse to water and making him drink. Oh, a most difficult and delicate business! For Fabio prided himself on his independence; and he was obstinate, like a mule. Nobody should interfere with his affairs; nobody should make him do what he didn't want to. And he was so touchy, he was so pig-headed that often he wouldn't do what he really wanted merely because somebody else had suggested that he ought to do it. So I could imagine—the old Count spread out his hands before me—just how difficult and delicate a business it had been. Only a consummate diplomat could have succeeded. He did it by throwing them together a great deal and talking, meanwhile, about the rashness of early marriages, the uselessness of poor wives, the undesirability of wives not of noble birth. It worked like a charm: within four months

Fabio, was engaged, two months later he was married, and ten months after that he had a son and heir. And now he was fixed, rooted. The old gentleman chuckled; and I could fancy that I was listening to the chuckling of some old white-haired tyrant of the *Quattrocento* congratulating himself on the success of some peculiarly ingenious stroke of policy—a rich city induced to surrender itself by fraud, a dangerous rival lured by fair words into a cage and trapped. Poor Fabio, I thought; and also, what a waste of talent!

Yes, the old Count went on, now he would never go. He was not like his younger brother Lucio. Lucio was a rogue, *furbo*, sly; he had no conscience. But Fabio had ideas about duty and lived up to them. Once he had engaged himself he would stick to his engagements, obstinately, with all the mulishness of his character. Well, now he lived on the estate, in the big painted house at Dolo. Three days a week he came into Padua for his military duties, and the rest of his time he devoted to the estate. It brought in, now, more than it had ever done before. But goodness knew, the old gentleman complained, that was little enough. Bread and oil and wine and milk and chickens and beef—there was plenty of those and to spare. Fabio could have a family of fifty and they would never starve. But ready money—there wasn't much of that. "In England," the Count concluded, "you are rich. But we Italians . . ." He shook his head.

I spent the next quarter of an hour trying to persuade him that we were not all millionaires. But in vain. My statistics, based on somewhat imperfect memories of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, carried no conviction. In the end I gave it up.

The next morning Fabio appeared at the door of my hotel in a large, very old and very noisy Fiat. It was the

family machine-of-all-work, bruised, scratched and dirtied by years of service. Fabio drove it with a brilliant and easy recklessness. We rushed through the town, swerving from one side of the narrow street to the other with a disregard for the rules of the road which, in a pedantic country like England, would have meant at the least a five-pound fine and an endorsed licence. But here the *carabinieri*, walking gravely in couples under the arcades, let us pass without comment. Right or left—after all, what did it matter?

“Why do you keep the silencer out?” I shouted through the frightful clamour of the engine.

Fabio slightly shrugged his shoulders. “E più allegro così,” he answered.

I said no more. From a member of this hardy race which likes noise, which enjoys discomfort, a nerve-ridden Englishman could hardly hope to get much sympathy.

We were soon out of the town. Trailing behind us a seething white wake of dust, and with the engine rattling off its explosions like a battery of machine-guns, we raced along the Fusina road. On either hand extended the cultivated plain. The road was bordered by ditches, and on the banks beyond, instead of hedges, stood rows of little pollards, with grape-laden vines festooned from tree to tree. White with the dust, tendrils, fruit and leaves hung there like so much goldsmith’s work sculptured in frosted metal—hung there like swags of fruit and foliage looped round the flanks of a great silver bowl. We hurried on. Soon, on our right hand, we had the Brenta, sunk deep between the banks of its canal. And now we were at Strà. Through gateways rich with fantastic stucco, down tunnels of undeciduous shade, we looked in a series of momentary glimpses into the heart of the park. And now for an instant the statues on the roof of the

villa beckoned against the sky and were passed. On we went. To right and left, on either bank of the river, I got every now and then a glimpse of some enchanting mansion, gay and brilliant even in decay. Little baroque garden houses peeped at me over walls; and through great gates, at the end of powdery cypress avenues—half humorously, it seemed—the magniloquent and frivolous façades soared up in defiance of all the rules. I should have liked to do the journey slowly, to stop here and there, to look, to savour at leisure; but Fabio disdained to travel at anything less than fifty kilometers to the hour, and I had to be content with momentary and precarious glimpses. It was in these villas, I reflected, as we bumped along at the head of our desolation of white dust, that Casanova used to come and spend the summer; seducing the chambermaids, taking advantage of terrified marchionesses in *calèches* during thunderstorms, bamboozling soft-witted old senators of Venice with his fortune-telling and black magic. Gorgeous and happy scoundrel! In spite of my professed detachment, I envied him. And, indeed, what was that famous detachment but a disguised expression of the envy which the successes and audacities of a Casanova must necessarily arouse in every timid and diffident mind? If I lived in splendid isolation, it was because I lacked the audacity to make war—even to make entangling alliances. I was absorbed in these pleasing self-condemnatory thoughts when the car slowed down and came to a standstill in front of a huge imposing gate. Fabio hooted impatiently on his horn; there was a scurry of footsteps, the sound of bolts being drawn, and the gate swung open. At the end of a short drive, very large and grave, very chaste and austere, stood the house. It was considerably older than most of the other villas I had seen in glimpses on our way. There was no frivolous-

ness in its façade, no irregular grandiloquence. A great block of stuccoed brick; a central portico approached by steps and topped with a massive pediment; a row of rigid statues on the balustrade above the cornice. It was correctly—coldly even—Palladian. Fabio brought the car to a halt in front of the porch. We got out. At the top of the steps stood a young woman with a red-headed child in her arms. It was the Countess with the son and heir.

The Countess impressed me very agreeably. She was slim and tall—two or three inches taller than her husband—with dark hair drawn back from the forehead and twisted into a knot on the nape of her neck; dark eyes, vague, lustrous and melancholy like the eyes of a gentle animal; a skin brown and transparent like darkened amber. Her manner was gentle and unemphatic. She rarely gesticulated; I never heard her raise her voice. She spoke, indeed, very little. The old Count had told me that his daughter-in-law was religious, and from her appearance I could easily believe it. She looked at you with the calm remote regard of one whose life mostly goes on behind the eyes.

Fabio kissed his wife and then, bending his face towards the child, he made a frightful grimace and roared like a lion. It was all done in affection; but the poor little creature shrank away terrified. Fabio laughed and pinched its ear.

"Don't tease him," said the Countess gently. "You'll make him cry."

Fabio turned to me. "That's what comes of leaving a boy to be looked after by women. He cries at everything. Let's come in," he added. "At present we only use two or three rooms on the ground floor and the kitchen in the basement. All the rest are deserted. I don't know how those old fellows managed to keep up their palaces.

I can't." He shrugged his shoulders. Through a door on the right of the portico we passed into the house. "This is our drawing-room and dining-room combined."

It was a fine big room, nobly proportioned—a double cube, I guessed—with doorways of sculptured marble and a magnificent fireplace flanked by a pair of nymphs on whose bowed shoulders rested a sloping overmantel carved with coats of arms and festoons of foliage. Round the walls ran a frieze, painted in grisaille; in a graceful litter of cornucopias and panoplies, goddesses sumptuously reclined, cherubs wriggled and flew. The furniture was strangely mixed. Round a sixteenth-century dining-table that was a piece of Palladian architecture in wood, were ranged eight chairs in the Viennese Secession style of 1905. A large chalet-shaped cuckoo clock from Bern hung on the wall between two cabinets of walnut, pilastered and pedimented to look like little temples, and with heroic statues in yellow boxwood standing in niches between the pillars. And then the pictures on the walls, the cretonnes with which the armchairs were covered! Tactfully, however, I admired everything, new as well as old.

"And now," said the Count, "for the frescoes."

I followed him through one of the marble framed doorways and found myself at once in the great central hall of the villa. The Count turned round on me. "There!" he said, smiling triumphantly, with the air of one who has really succeeded in producing a rabbit out of an empty hat. And indeed the spectacle was sufficiently astonishing.

The walls of the enormous room were completely covered with frescoes which it did not need much critical judgment or knowledge to perceive were genuine Veroneses. The authorship was obvious, palpable. Who

else could have painted those harmoniously undulating groups of figures set in their splendid architectural frame? Who else but Veronese could have combined such splendour with such coolness, so much extravagant opulence with such exquisite suavity?

"È grandioso!" I said to the Count.

And indeed it was. Grandiose: there was no other word. A rich triumphal arcade ran all round the room, four or five arches appearing on each wall. Through the arches one looked into a garden; and there, against a background of cypresses and statues and far-away blue mountains, companies of Venetian ladies and gentlemen gravely disported themselves. Under one arch they were making music; through another one saw them sitting round a table, drinking one another's health in glasses of red wine, while a little blackamoor in a livery of green and yellow carried round the silver jug. In the next panel they were watching a fight between a monkey and a cat. On the opposite wall a poet was reading his verses to the assembled company; and next to him Veronese himself—the self-portrait was recognizable—stood at his easel, painting the picture of an opulent blonde in rose-coloured satin. At the feet of the artist lay his dog; two parrots and a monkey were sitting on the marble balustrade in the middle distance.

I gazed with delight. "What a marvellous thing to possess!" I exclaimed, fairly carried away by my enthusiasm. "I envy you."

The Count made a little grimace and laughed. "Shall we come and look at the Tiepolos?" he asked.

We passed through a couple of cheerful rooms by Carpioni—satyrs chasing nymphs through a romantic forest and, on the fringes of a seascape, a very eccentric rape of mermaids by centaurs^f—to step across a threshold

into that brilliant universe, at once delicate and violently extravagant, wild and subtly orderly, which Tiepolo, in the last days of Italian painting, so masterfully and magically created. It was the story of Eros and Psyche, and the tale ran through three large rooms, spreading itself even on to the ceilings, where, in a pale sky dappled with white and golden clouds, the appropriate deities balanced themselves, diving or ascending through the empyrean with that air of being perfectly at home in their element which seems to belong, in nature, only to fishes and perhaps a few winged insects and birds.

Fabio had boasted to me that, in front of a picture, he could outstare any foreigner. But I was such a mortally long time admiring these dazzling phantasies that in the end he quite lost patience.

"I wanted to show you the farm before lunch," he said, looking at his watch. "There's only just time." I followed him reluctantly.

We looked at the cows, the horses, the prize bull, the turkeys. We looked at the tall thin haystacks, shaped like giant cigars set on end. We looked at the sacks of wheat in the barns; I told the Count that they reminded me of the sacks of wheat in English barns; he seemed delighted with the comment.

The farm buildings were set round an immense courtyard. We had explored three sides of this piazza; now we came to the fourth, which was occupied by a long low building pierced with round archways and, I was surprised to see, completely empty.

"What's this?"

"It is nothing," the Count replied, "but it might, some day, become . . . *chi sa?*" He stood there for a moment in silence, frowning pensively, with the expression of Napoleon on St. Helena—dreaming of the future, re-

gretting past opportunities for ever lost. His freckled face, ordinarily a lamp for brightness, became incongruously sombre. Then all at once he burst out—damning life, cursing fate, wishing to God he could get away and do something instead of wasting himself here. I listened, making every now and then a vague noise of sympathy. What could I do about it? And then, to my dismay, I found that I could do something about it, that I was expected to do something. I was being asked to help the Count to sell his frescoes. As an artist, it was obvious, I must be acquainted with rich patrons, museums, millionaires. I had seen the frescoes; I could honestly recommend them. And now there was this perfected process for transferring frescoes on to canvas. The walls could easily be peeled of their painting, the canvases rolled up and taken to Venice. And from there it would be the easiest thing in the world to smuggle them on board a ship and get away with them. As for prices—if he could get a million and a half lire, so much the better; but he'd take a million; he'd even taken three-quarters. And he'd give me ten per cent. commission. . . .

And afterwards, when he'd sold his frescoes, what would he do? To begin with—the Count smiled at me triumphantly—he'd turn this empty building in which we were now standing, into an up-to-date cheese factory. He could start the business handsomely on half a million, and then, using cheap female labour from the country round, he could be almost sure of making big profits at once. In a couple of years, he calculated, he'd be netting eighty or a hundred thousand a year from his cheeses. And then—ah then, he'd be independent, he'd be able to get away, he'd see the world! He'd go to Brazil and the Argentine. An enterprising man with capital could always do well out there. He'd go to New York, to Lon-

don, to Berlin, to Paris. There was nothing he could not do.

But meanwhile the frescoes were still on the walls—beautiful, no doubt (for, the Count reminded me, he adored art), but futile; a huge capital frozen into the plaster, eating its head off, utterly useless. Whereas, with his cheese factory . . .

Slowly we walked back towards the house.

I was in Venice again in the September of the following year, 1913. There were, I imagine, that autumn, more German honeymoon couples, more parties of ruck-sacked Wander-Birds than there had ever been in Venice before. There were too many, in any case, for me; I packed my bag and took the train for Padua.

I had not originally intended to see the young Tirabassi again. I didn't know, indeed, how pleased he would be to see me. For the frescoes—so far as I knew, at any rate—were still safely on the walls; the cheese-factory still remote in the future, in the imagination. I had written to him more than once, telling him that I was doing my best, but that at the moment, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. Not that I had ever held out much hope. I had made it clear from the first that my acquaintance among millionaires was limited, that I knew no directors of American museums, that I had nothing to do with any of the international picture dealers. But the Count's faith in me had remained, none the less, unshaken. It was the little Mexican, I believe, that inspired so much confidence. But now, after my letters—after all this lapse of time and nothing done—he might feel that I had let him down, deceived him somehow. That was why I took no steps to seek him out. But chance overruled my decision. On the third day of my stay in Padua, I ran into him in the street. Or, rather, he ran into me.

It was nearly six o'clock, and I had strolled down to the Piazza del Santo. At that hour, when the slanting light is full of colour and the shadows are long and profound, the great church, with its cupolas and turrets and campaniles, takes on an aspect more than ever fantastic and oriental. I had walked round the church, and now I was standing at the foot of Donatello's statue, looking up at the grim bronze man, the ponderously stepping beast, when I suddenly became aware that someone was standing very close behind me. I took a step to one side and turned round. It was Fabio. Wearing his famous expression of the sight-seeing parson, he was gazing up at the statue, his mouth open in a vacant and fishlike gape. I burst out laughing.

"Did I look like that?" I asked.

"Precisely." He laughed too. "I've been watching you for the last ten minutes, mooning round the church. You English! Really . . ." He shook his head.

Together we strolled up the Via del Santo, talking as we went.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to do anything about the frescoes," I said. "But really . . ." I entered into explanations.

"Some day, perhaps." Fabio was still optimistic.

"And how's the Countess?"

"Oh, she's very well," said Fabio, "considering. You know she had another son three or four months after you came to see us."

"No?"

"She's expecting another now." Fabio spoke rather gloomily, I thought. More than ever I admired the old Count's sagacity. But I was sorry for his son's sake that he had not a wider field in which to exercise his talents.

"And your father?" I asked. "Shall we find him sitting at Pedrochi's, as usual?"

Fabio laughed. "We shall not," he said significantly. "He's flown."

"Flown?"

"Gone, vanished, disappeared."

"But where?"

"Who knows?" said Fabio. "My father is like the swallows: he comes and he goes. Every year. But the migration isn't regular. Sometimes he goes away in the spring, sometimes it's the autumn, sometimes it's the summer. One fine morning his man goes into his room to call him as usual, and he isn't there. Vanished. He might be dead. Oh, but he isn't." Fabio laughed. "Two or three months later, in he walks again, as though he were just coming back from a stroll in the Botanical Gardens. 'Good evening. Good evening.'" Fabio imitated the old Count's voice and manner, snuffing the air like a war-horse, twisting the ends of an imaginary white moustache. "'How's your mother? How are the girls? How have the grapes done this year?' (Snuff, snuff.) 'How's Lucio? And who the devil has left all this rubbish lying about in my study?'" Fabio burst into an indignant roar that made the loiterers in the Via Roma turn, astonished, in our direction.

"And where does he go?" I asked.

"Nobody knows. My mother used to ask, once. But she soon gave it up. It was no good. 'Where have you been, Ascanio?' 'My dear, I'm afraid the olive crop is going to be very poor this year.' (Snuff, snuff.) And when she pressed him, he would fly into a temper and slam the doors. . . . What do you say to an *aperitif*?" Pedrochi's open doors invited. We entered, chose a retired table, and sat down.

"But what do you suppose the old gentleman does when he's away?"

"Ah!" And making the richly significant gesture I had so much admired in his father, the young Count laid his finger against his nose and slowly, solemnly winked his left eye.

"You mean . . .?"

Fabio nodded. "There's a little widow here in Padua." With his extended finger the young Count described in the air an undulating line. "Nice and plump. Black eyes. I've noticed that she generally seems to be out of town just at the time the old man does his migrations. But it may, of course, be a mere coincidence." The waiter brought us our vermouth. Pensively the young Count sipped. The gaiety went out of his open lamp-like face. "And meanwhile," he went on, slowly and in an altered voice, "I stay here, looking after the estate, so that the old man can go running round the world with his little pigeon—*la sua colombella*." (The expression struck me as particularly choice.) "Oh, it's funny, no doubt," the young Count went on. "But it isn't right. If I wasn't married I'd go clean away and try my luck somewhere else. I'd leave him to look after everything himself. But with a wife and two children—three children soon—how can I take the risk? At any rate, there's plenty to eat as long as I stay here. My only hope," he added after a little pause, "is in the frescoes."

Which implied, I reflected, that his only hope was in me; I felt sorry for him.

In the spring of 1914 I sent two rich Americans to look at Fabio's villa. Neither of them made any offer to buy the frescoes; it would have astonished me if they had. But Fabio was greatly encouraged by their arrival. "I feel," he wrote to me, "that a beginning has now been

made. These Americans will go back to their country and tell their friends. Soon there will be a procession of millionaires coming to see the frescoes. Meanwhile, life is the same as ever. Rather worse, if anything. Our little daughter, whom we have christened Emilia, was born last month. My wife had a very bad time and is still far from well, which is very troublesome." (It seemed a curious adjective to use, in the circumstances. But, coming from Fabio, I understood it; he was one of those exceedingly healthy people to whom any sort of illness is mysterious, unaccountable, and, above all, extraordinarily tiresome and irritating.) "The day before yesterday my father disappeared again. I have not yet had time to find out if the Colombella has also vanished. My brother Lucio has succeeded in getting a motor bicycle out of him, which is more than I ever managed to do. But then, I was never one for creeping diplomatically round and round a thing, as he can do. I have been going very carefully into the cheese-factory business lately, and I am not sure that it might not be more profitable to set up a silk-weaving establishment instead. When you next come, I will go into details with you."

But it was a very long time before I saw Padua and the Count again. The war put an end to my yearly visits to Italy, and for various reasons, even when it was over, I could not go south again as soon as I should have liked. Not till the autumn of 1921 did I embark on the Venice express.

It was in an Italy not altogether familiar that I now found myself—an Italy full of violence and bloodshed. The Fascists and the Communists were still busily fighting. Roaring at the head of their dust-storms, the motor lorries loaded with cargoes of singing boys careered across the country in search of adventure and lurking Bolshe-

vism. One stood respectfully in the gutter while they passed; and through the flying dust, through the noise of the engine, a snatch of that singing would be blown back: "Giovinezza, giovinezza, primavera di bellezza . . ." (Youth, youth, spring-time of beauty.) Where but in Italy would they have put such words to a political song? And then the proclamations, the manifestoes, the denunciations, the appeals! Every hoarding and blank wall was plastered with them. Between the station and Pedrochi's I walked through a whole library of these things. "Citizens!" they would begin, "a heroic wind is to-day reviving the almost asphyxiated soul of our unhappy Italy, overcome by the poisonous fumes of Bolshevism and wallowing in ignoble abasement at the feet of the nations." And they finished, for the most part, with references to Dante. I read them all with infinite pleasure.

I reached Pedrochi's at last. On the terrace, sitting in the very corner where I had seen him first, years before, was the old Count. He stared at me blankly when I saluted him, not recognizing me at all. I began to explain who I was; after a moment he cut me short, almost impatiently, protesting that he remembered now, perfectly well. I doubted very much whether he really did; but he was too proud to confess that he had forgotten. Meanwhile he invited me to sit at his table.

At a first glance, from a distance, I fancied that the old Count had not aged a day since last I saw him. But I was wrong. From the street I had only seen the rakish tilt of his hat, the bristling of his white moustache and imperial, the parted knees, the noble protrusion of the paunch. But, now that I could look at him closely and at leisure, I saw that he was in fact a very different man. Under the tilted hat his face was unhealthily purple; the flesh sagged into pouches. In the whites of his eyes, dis-

coloured and as though tarnished with age, the little broken veins showed red. And, lustreless, the eyes themselves seemed to look without interest at what they saw. His shoulders were bent as though under a weight and, when he lifted his cup to his lips, his hand trembled so much that a drop of coffee splashed on to the table. He was an old man now—old and tired.

“How’s Fabio?” I asked; since 1916 I had had no news of him.

“Oh, Fabio’s well,” the old Count answered. “Fabio’s very well. He has six children now, you know.” And the old gentleman nodded and smiled at me without a trace of malice. He seemed quite to have forgotten the reasons for which he had been at so much pains to select a good Catholic for a daughter-in-law. “Six!” he repeated. “And then, you know, he did very well in the war. We Tirabassi have always been warriors.” Full of pride, he went on to tell me of Fabio’s exploits and sufferings—twice wounded, special promotion on the field of battle, splendid decorations. He was a major now.

“And do his military duties still keep him in Padua?”

The old gentleman nodded, and suddenly there appeared on his face something like the old smile. “A little *combinazione* of mine,” he said, and chuckled.

“And the estate?” I asked.

Oh, that was doing all right, everything considered. It had got rather out of hand during the war, while Fabio was at the front. And then, afterwards, there had been a lot of trouble with the peasants; but Fabio and his Fascists were putting all that to rights. “With Fabio on the spot,” said the old gentleman, “I have no anxieties.” And then he began to tell me, all over again, about Fabio’s exploits in the war.

The next day I took the tram to Strà and, after an

hour agreeably spent in the villa and the park, I walked on at my leisure towards Dolo. It took me a long time to get there, for on this occasion I was able to stop and look for as long as I liked at all the charming things on the way. Casanova seemed, now, a good deal less enviable, I noticed, looking inwards on myself, than he had when last I passed this way. I was nine years older.

The gates were open; I walked in. There stood the house, as grave and ponderous as ever, but shabbier than when I saw it last. The shutters needed painting, and here and there the stucco was peeling off in scabs. I approached. From within the house came a cheerful noise of children's laughter and shouting. The family, I supposed, was playing hide-and-seek, or trains, or perhaps some topical game of Fascists and Communists. As I climbed the steps of the porch I could hear the sound of small feet racing over the tiled floors; in the empty rooms footsteps and shouting strangely echoed. And then suddenly, from the sitting-room on the right, came the sound of Fabio's voice, furiously shouting, "Oh, for God's sake," it yelled, "keep those wretched children quiet!" And then, petulantly, it complained, "How do you expect me to do accounts with this sort of thing going on?" There was at once a profound and, as it were, unnatural silence; then the sound of small feet tiptoeing away, some whispering, a little nervous laugh. I rang the bell.

It was the Countess who opened the door. She stood for a moment hesitatingly, wondering who I was; then remembered, smiled, held out her hand. She had grown, I noticed, very thin, and, with the wasting of her face, her eyes seemed to have become larger. Their expression was as gentle and serene as ever; she seemed to be looking at me from a distance.

"Fabio will be delighted to see you," she said, and she

took me through the door on the right of the porch straight into the sitting-room. Fabio was sitting at the Palladian table in front of a heap of papers, biting the end of his pencil.

Even in his grey-green service uniform the young Count looked wonderfully brilliant, like a soldier on the stage. His face was still boyishly freckled, but the skin was deeply lined; he looked very much older than when I had seen him last—older than he really was. The open cheerfulness, the shining lamp-like brightness were gone. On his snubby-featured face he wore a ludicrously incongruous expression of chronic melancholy. He brightened, it is true, for a moment when I appeared; I think he was genuinely glad to see me.

"*Caspita!*" he kept repeating, "*caspita!*" (It was his favourite expression of astonishment, an odd old-fashioned word.) "Who would have thought it? After all this time!"

"And all the eternity of the war as well," I said.

But when the first ebullition of surprise and pleasure subsided, the look of melancholy came back.

"It gives me the spleen," he said, "to see you again; still travelling about; free to go where you like. If you knew what life was like here . . ."

"Well, in any case," I said, feeling that I ought, for the Countess's sake, to make some sort of protest—"in any case, the war's over, and you have escaped a real revolution. That's something."

"Oh, you're as bad as Laura," said the Count impatiently. He looked towards his wife, as though hoping that she would say something. But the Countess went on with her sewing, without even looking up. The Count took my arm. "Come along," he said, and his tone was almost one of anger. "Let's take a turn outside." His

wife's religious resignation, her patience, her serenity angered him, I could see, like a reprimand—tacit, indeed, and unintentionally given, but none the less galling.

Along the weed-grown paths of what had once, in the ancient days of splendour, been the garden, slowly we walked towards the farm. A few ragged box-trees grew along the fringes of the paths; once there had been neat hedges. Poised over a dry basin, a Triton blew his waterless conch. At the end of the vista a pair of rapes—Pluto and Proserpine, Apollo and Daphne—writhed desperately against the sky.

"I saw your father yesterday," I said. "He looks aged."

"And so he ought," said Fabio murderously. "He's sixty-nine."

I felt uncomfortably that the subject had become too serious for light conversation. I had wanted to ask after the *colombella*; in the circumstances, I decided that it would be wiser to say nothing about her. I repressed my curiosity. We were walking now under the lee of the farm buildings.

"The cows look very healthy," I said politely, looking through an open doorway. In the twilight within, six grey rumps plastered with dry dung presented themselves in file; six long leather tails swished impatiently from side to side. Fabio made no comment; he only grunted.

"In any case," he went on slowly, after another silence, "he can't live much longer. I shall sell my share and clear off to South America, family or no family." It was a threat against his own destiny of which he must have known the vanity. He was deceiving himself to keep up his spirits.

"But I say," I exclaimed, taking another and better opportunity to change the conversation, "I see you have

started a factory here after all." We had walked round to the farther side of the square. Through the windows of the long low building which, at my last visit, had stood untenanted I saw the complicated shapes of machines—rows of them in a double line down the whole length of the building. "Looms? Then you decided against cheese? And the frescoes?" I turned questioningly towards the Count. I had a horrible fear that, when we got back to the house, I should find the great hall peeled of its Veroneses, and a blank of plaster where once had been the history of Eros and Psyche.

"Oh! the frescoes are still there, what's left of them." And, in spite of Fabio's long face, I was delighted at the news. "I persuaded my father to sell some of his house property in Padua, and we started this weaving business here two years ago. Just in time," Fabio added, "for the Communist revolution."

Poor Fabio! He had no luck. The peasants had seized his factory and had tried to possess themselves of his land. For three weeks he had lived at the villa in a state of siege, defending the place with twenty Fascists to help him, against all the peasants of the countryside. The danger was over now; but the machines were broken, and in any case it was out of the question to start them again; feeling was still too high. And what, for Fabio, made it worse was the fact that his brother Lucio, who had also got a little capital out of the old man, had gone off to Bulgaria and invested it in a bootlace factory. It was the only bootlace factory in the country, and Lucio was making money hand over fist. Free as air he was, well off, with a lovely Turkish girl for a mistress. For Fabio, the Turkish girl was evidently the last straw. "Una Turca, una vera Turca," he repeated, shaking his head. The female infidel symbolized in his eyes all that

was exotic, irregular, undomestic; all that was not the family; all that was remote from Padua and the estate.

"And they were such beautiful machines," said Fabio, pausing for a moment to look in at the last of the long line of windows. "Whether to sell them, whether to wait till all this has blown over and have them put right and try to start again—I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. "Or just let things slide till the old man dies." We turned the corner of the square and began to walk back towards the house. "Sometimes," he added after a silence, "I don't believe he ever will die."

The children were playing in the great hall of the Veroneses. The majestic double doors which gave on to the portico were ajar; through the opening we watched them for a moment without being seen. The family was formed up in order of battle. A red-headed boy of ten or eleven led the van, a brown boy followed. Then came three little girls, diminishing regularly in size like graded pearls; and finally a little toddling creature in blue linen crawlers. All six of them carried shouldered bamboos, and they were singing in ragged unison to a kind of trumpet call of three notes "All' armi i Fascisti; a morte i Comunisti; ab basso i Socialisti!"—over and over again. And as they sang they marched, round and round, earnestly, indefatigably. The huge empty room echoed like a swimming-bath. Remote under their triumphal arches, in their serene world of fantastic beauty, the silken ladies and gentlemen played their music, drank their wine; the poet declaimed, the painter poised his brush before the canvas; the monkeys clambered among the Roman ruins, the parrots dozed on the balustrades. "All' armi i Fascisti, a morte i Comunisti . . ." I should have liked to stand there in silence, merely to see how

long the children would continue their patriotic march. But Fabio had none of my scientific curiosity; or, if he ever had, it had certainly been exhausted long before the last of his children was born. After indulging me for a moment with the spectacle he pushed open the door and walked in. The children looked round and were immediately silent. What with his bad temper and his theory of education by teasing, they seemed to be thoroughly frightened of their father.

"Go on," he said, "go on!" But they wouldn't; they obviously couldn't in his terrifying presence. Unobtrusively, they slipped away.

Fabio led me round the painted room. "Look here," he said. "And look here." In one of the walls of the great hall there were half a dozen bullet holes. A chip had been taken off one of the painted cornices; one lady was horribly wounded in the face; there were two or three holes on the landscape, and a monkey's tail was severed. "That's our friends the peasants," Fabio explained.

In the Carpioni rooms all was still well; the satyrs still pursued their nymphs, and in the room of the centaurs and the mermaids, the men who were half horses still galloped as tumultuously as ever into the sea, to ravish the women who were half fish. But the tale of Eros and Psyche had suffered dreadfully. The exquisite panel in which Tiepolo had painted Psyche holding up the lamp to look at her mysterious lover was no more than a faint mildewy smudge. And where once the indignant young god had flown upwards to rejoin his Olympian relatives (who, fortunately, still swam about intact among the clouds on the ceiling) there was nothing but the palest ghost of an ascending Cupid, while Psyche weeping on the earth below was now quite invisible.

"That's our friends the French," said Fabio. "They

were quartered here in 1918, and they didn't trouble to shut the windows when it rained."

Poor Fabio! Everything was against him. I had no consolation to offer. That autumn I sent him an art critic and three more Americans. But nothing came of their visits. The fact was that he had too much to offer. A picture—that might easily have been disposed of. But what could one do with a whole houseful of paintings like this?

The months passed. About Easter time of the next year I had another letter from Fabio. The olive crop had been poor. The Countess was expecting another baby and was far from well. The two eldest children were down with measles, and the last but one had what the Italians call an "asinine cough." He expected all the children to catch both diseases in due course. He was very doubtful now if it would ever be worth while to restart his looms. The position of the silk trade was not so sound as it had been at the end of 1919. If only he had stuck to cheese as he first intended! Lucio had just made fifty thousand lire by a lucky stroke of speculation. But the female infidel had run off with a Rumanian. The old Count was ageing rapidly; when Fabio saw him last, he had told the same anecdote three times in the space of ten minutes. With these two pieces of good news—they were for him, I imagine, the only bright spots in the surrounding gloom—Fabio closed his letter. I was left wondering why he troubled to write to me at all. It may be that he got a certain lacerating satisfaction by thus enumerating his troubles.

That August there was a musical festival in Salzburg. I had never been in Austria; the occasion seemed to me a good one. I went, and I enjoyed myself prodigiously. Salzburg, at the moment, is all in the movement. There

are baroque churches in abundance; there are Italianate fountains; there are gardens and palaces that mimic, in their extravagantly ponderous Teutonic way, the gardens and palaces of Rome. And—choicest treasure of all!—there is a tunnel forty feet high bored through a precipitous crag—a tunnel such as only a Prince Bishop of the seventeenth century could have dreamed of, having at either end an arch of triumph, with pilasters, broken pediments, statues, scutcheons all carved out of the living rock. A masterpiece among tunnels, and in a town where everything, without being really good, is exquisitely “amusing,” the most amusing feature of all. Ah, decidedly, Salzburg is in the movement.

One afternoon I took the funicular up to the castle. There is a beer terrace under the walls of the fortress from which you get a view that is starred in Baedeker. Below you on one side lies the town, spread out in the curving valley, with a river running through it, like a small and German version of Florence. From the other side of the terrace you look out over a panorama that makes no pretence to Italianism; it is as sweetly and romantically German as an air out of Weber’s “Freischütz.” There are mountains on the horizon, spiky and blue, like mountains in a picture-book; and in the foreground, extending to the very foot of the extremely improbable crag on which the castle and the beer garden are perched, stretches a flat green plain—miles upon miles of juicy meadows dotted with minusculous cows, with here and there a neat toy farm or, more rarely, a cluster of dolls’ houses with a spire going up glittering from the midst of them.

I was sitting with my blond beer in front of this delicious and slightly comical landscape, thinking comfortably of nothing in particular, when I heard behind

me a rapturous voice exclaiming, "Bello, bello!" I looked round curiously—for it seemed to me somehow rather surprising to hear Italian spoken here—and saw one of those fine sumptuous women they admire so much in the South. She was a *bella grassa*, plump to the verge of over-ripeness and perilously near middle age; but still, in her way, exceedingly handsome. Her face had the proportions of an iceberg—one-fifth above water, four-fifths below. Ample and florid from the eyes downwards, it was almost foreheadless; the hair began immediately above the brows. The eyes themselves were dark, large and—for my taste, at least—somewhat excessively tender in expression. I took her in in a moment and was about to look away again when her companion, who had been looking at the view on the other side, turned round. It was the old Count.

I was far more embarrassed, I believe, than he. I felt myself blushing, as our eyes met, as though it were I who had been travelling about the world with a *colombella* and he who had caught me in the act. I did not know what to do—whether to smile and speak to him; or to turn away as though I had not recognized him; or to nod from a distance and then, discreetly, to disappear. But the old Count put an end to my irresolution by calling out my name in astonishment, by running up to me and seizing my hand. What a delight to see an old friend! Here, of all places! In this God-forsaken country—though it was cheap enough, didn't I find? He would introduce me to a charming compatriot of his own, an Italian lady he had met yesterday in the train from Vienna.

I was made known to the *colombella*, and we all sat down at my table. Speaking resolutely in Italian, the Count ordered two more beers. We talked. Or, rather, the Count talked; for the conversation was a monologue.

He told us anecdotes of the Italy of fifty years ago; he gave us imitations of the queer characters he had known; he even, at one moment, imitated the braying of an ass—I forget in what context, but the braying remains vividly in my memory. Snuffing the air between every sentence, he gave us his views on women. The *colombella* screamed indignant protests, dissolved herself in laughter. The old Count twisted his moustaches, twinkling at her through the network of his wrinkles. Every now and then he turned in my direction and gave me a little wink.

I listened in astonishment. Was this the man who had told the same anecdote three times in ten minutes? I looked at the old Count. He was leaning towards the *colombella* whispering something in her ear which made her laugh so much that she had to wipe the tears from her eyes. Turning away from her he caught my eye; smiling, he shrugged his shoulders as though to say, "These women! What imbeciles, but how delicious, how indispensable!" Was this the tired old man I had seen a year ago sitting on Pedrochi's terrace? It seemed incredible.

"Well, good-bye—*a rivederci*." They had to get down into the town again. The funicular was waiting.

"I'm delighted to have seen you," said the old Count, shaking me affectionately by the hand.

"And so am I," I protested. "Particularly delighted to see you so well."

"Yes, I'm wonderfully well, now," he said, blowing out his chest.

"And young," I went on. "Younger than I am! How have you done it?"

"Aha!" The old Count cocked his head on one side mysteriously.

More in joke than in earnest, "I believe you've been seeing Steinach in Vienna," I said. "Having a rejuvenating operation."

For all reply, the old Count raised the forefinger of his right hand, laying it first to his lips, then along the side of his nose, and winking as he did so. Then clenching his fist, and with his thumb sticking rigidly up, he made a complicated gesture which would, I am sure, for an Italian, have been full of a profound and vital significance. To me, however, unfamiliar with the language of signs, the exact meaning was not entirely clear. But the Count offered no verbal explanation. Still without uttering a word, he raised his hat; then, laying his finger once more to his lips, he turned and ran with an astonishing agility down the steep path towards the little carriage of the funicular, in which the *colombella* had already taken her seat.

F. TENNYSON JESSE

BAKER'S FURY

THE farm known as Baker's Fury stretched to the head of the cliff, although for the last quarter of a mile the rabbit-nibbled turf was too thickly set with gorse to be of any use to the farmer. London visitors raved about that strip of useless soil—boulders, granite, rabbits, were all lovely in their eyes, as were the steep cliffs that went down into the boiling whiteness of the Atlantic surge. There was one place where a creek ran sharply into the side of the headland, like a wound, that the visitors especially admired, for there, even on a calm day, the sea was never still. Smooth rollers, as they broke against its narrow mouth, were forced in by the weight of the urging waters behind them in a roaring torrent that rose and frothed like yeast in the round basin within, sometimes shooting up forty or fifty feet in the air like the spouting of a giant whale. The farmer felt a certain pride in this blowhole, and used to give permission to picnickers to go and eat at the top of the cliffs, on condition that they left no scraps of paper lying about—a condition that, for the most part, picnickers faithfully carried out, not perhaps so much from a sense of beauty, or from a sense of honour, but because it was such fun to toss screwed-up balls of paper into the air above the blowhole, where they danced about on the up-rushing air like corks atop the jet

of a fountain. The farmer grudged this useless tract of land, but he also was not without his sense of beauty, queer and tormenting, which his stern cliffs and angry waters ministered to after their fashion.

Silas Treeve was a whisht man, said his neighbours, hard as his cliffs, grudging as his soil, stiff as his gorse, and yet with something portentous and violent eating at his nature, as the sea ate ceaselessly at the narrow entry of the blowhole. He allowed himself no outlet for his hidden violence, no harmless uprearing, regular as a pulsation, such as released the violence of the sea when it found itself in the narrow circle of the blowhole; it was somewhere deep down within his soul that the dangerous force was for ever piling itself up without any apparent egress. He was a widower, and his house was kept for him by his fourteen-year-old daughter, Julia Ann. Julia had large, clear, empty eyes, blue as the vernal squill which grew along the cliff in spring, eyes whose limpid vacancy seemed only specked by the tiny black pupils. She was not popular with the maiden sisters, daughters and aunts of the country people, who considered it a flying in the face of Providence on the part of Silas Treeve that he did not provide so young a daughter with a second mother. How could a young maiden be brought up fittingly without an older woman's care? And Julia was self-sufficient, that was the worst of it. She never repudiated advice, in fact she spoke but rarely, and many a kindly neighbour, after pointing out to her what she ought to do both for her father and the little six-year-old brother in her care, went home thinking she had made great headway with the pale, silent girl, only to find that the advice was left unheeded as a last year's bird's nest.

If the strangeness in Silas Treeve were more guessed at than perceived, in his daughter it was evident enough.



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F. TENNYSON JESSE

She, too, was still and quiet, with no obvious flaring-out of violence, but her very quietness was what seemed so strange in a mere child. Even at school she would wander away from the other children and sit broodingly alone while they played their noisy, formless games, and when, at fourteen, she was free of their enforced society, she made no effort to see any of them again. Doubtless, said the kindlier of the neighbours, her deformity, slight as it was—a mere thickening above the shoulders as though a burden had been laid across them under her shabby frock—made her withdraw into herself. She was not like a child, and never had been—so said everyone except little Christopher John. He knew what wonderful games she made for him in the warm sheltered nooks set about the cliff face, how she turned harebells and gorse blossoms into fantastic little people with twig legs and arms, how she told him long stories of the rabbits, making him lie so still that on a sunny morning or evening he would see the little creatures playing about like kittens only a few paces away. He knew from Julia's lips of the beautiful though cruel merrymaids, who came floating in atop of the grassy billows on a moonlight night, combing their yellow hair and singing to try and allure the careless or the drunken passer-by.

There had been a day—Christopher John was frightened even to remember it—when he had got playing with some of the children from the village and had tried to tell them some of Julia's wonderful stories. They had all laughed at him and told him that his sister was whisht and that everything she taught him was only a pack of silly nonsense fit for girls. Christopher John had come back, and next time Julia had started to play with him, he turned up his nose at her, persisting in scorning her efforts. He never felt such fear, not even when the bull

had run after him, as he did when Julia turned on him. She had seized his sturdy little arms in her two bony, hard-fingered hands, and shaken him till the sky seemed to whirl about his dizzy head, her big light eyes so close to his that he could not bear to meet their furious intensity.

"Christopher John, you'm been with them children to the village, you'm been listenin' to their evil tongues! Don' you dare ever do that again—you hear me? You lave en be or I'll tell the buccas of 'ee and they'll come and draw 'ee out of tha bed and take 'ee down to the tin mines, never to see the light of day—never any more, du 'ee hear me, Christopher John?" and he had howled bitterly in his terror and she had caught him up to her thin flat little breast and comforted him. But ever afterwards he was afraid of her, and still more afraid lest she should discover his fear.

In the spring of the year when Julia was rising fifteen and Christopher John nearly seven, a great preacher came to that district from up the Duchy. He had been a tin miner in his unregenerate youth, a swearer, a drinker, a seeker after women and false gods, but now he was a great saint and a mighty hammer in the hand of the Lord.

Silas Treeve's pale eyes—so like his daughter's, only smaller and more sunken in their deep sockets, glowed as he spoke of the man. Salvation had come to the dwellers in West Penwith and in that salvation Silas and his children should have part. Julia listened to her father during those short tense evenings, between the washing-up of the supper things and the early bed, listened with her pointed chin cupped in her too-large hands, the pupils of her eyes growing larger and spreading over the vacant blue of the iris, so that only the clear light rims showed like the rim of light round an eclipse. Christopher John would be in bed, his favourite toy—a battered wooden

horse—clasped to his breast. Silas Treeve talked to Julia about religion as to an equal. Of course, she had always known that her father was religious—she had always gone to chapel with him—had sat of a Sunday evening ever since she could remember while he laboriously spelled out long chapters of Leviticus, or some such arduous book, by the light of the white china oil lamp. Since she had left school, it was she who had done the reading aloud, as she read more easily than he did, and he would sit and listen, occasionally moaning, or uttering ejaculations to the Lord, whenever she came to a peculiarly poignant passage relating to death and the judgment. But Julia had never realized that religion was more than a slow burning core within him—she had never known till now that it could be a mighty upheaving of flame. Father and daughter sat opposite to each other at the kitchen table, their intent faces thrust forward in the pool of light cast by the lamp; and around them was the outer darkness of the rest of the room, and of the rest of the world.

"'T'es a great thing, Julia Ann, the comin' of the word of the Lard to these parts where men are the slaves of the lusts of the flesh. There will be a quickenin' through the land of the spirit. It will run through the land as the fire runs through the gorse in swaling time."

"Will us all be good then, Da?"

"Us'll all be good so far as our hearts 'll let us, but the heart of man is a vain and deceitful thing."

"And what's the hearts of women, Da?"

"Them'm vain and deceitful too. Even the hearts of little children is vain and deceitful."

"Not Christopher John's," said Julia quickly.

Strangely, so it struck her, the face of Silas grew darker instead of brightening at her words.

"Christopher John will have to look to his heart more

than most," he said sombrely. She stared at him with widened eyes.

"What du 'ee mean, Da? Why my li'l Christopher John more than most?"

There was a little silence that seemed to hang heavily in the air, almost tangible.

"How old are 'ee maid?"

"Fifteen, Da, come eight months."

"Fifteen?" he repeated absently. "That's nigh a woman. Girls of that age have got into trouble afore now."

The slow dusky red of resentful virginity spread over Julia's pale face.

"I'm not sayin' you're not a good lass—I'm just statin' a fact. 'T'es time you did know, Julia."

"Knew what?"

"About your mawther, my maid."

"My mawther? She'm dead."

"Yes—she'm dead right enough, but not before she had made a pile o' trouble and laid up a pile of sins upon her soul. She was a light woman, Julia, and she nearly drew my soul down into perdition along wi' her. She had tricks to her that'd cause a man to forget his Maker, even if he stood at the mouth of the pit. I saved my soul alive, but it was a brand plucked from the burning. The smell of the flames is in my nostrils yet, dark nights."

Julia began to shake and she kept her chin pressed upon her hands, so that her teeth should make no noise, until the table, which was light and stood unevenly upon the earthen floor, vibrated beneath her elbows. She kept her eyes fixed on her father's face.

"Tell me, Da."

"I caught her in her sin—not even in a bed like a decent backslider but out in the heather like the beasts of the

fields. I never laid finger on her again, and nine months after Christopher John was barn."

Julia was not ignorant of the lore of the farmyard, but from any personal application of knowledge she had been austere free. Again the painful red flush burned in her sallow cheeks and mottled her high forehead.

"Ain't Christopher John thy son, Da?"

"As God's above us, I don't know, maid, but I don't think so, and that's the truth as I see it. No man can say more. Where did he get his colour from and the black eyes of him? His mother was red-headed, but the fellow I caught was black as one o' them foreign sailors with the rings in their ears that come selling onions on the boats from France. She died when Christopher John were barn as you du know and she died swearin' he was mine—but I don't think it, an' I think it less now than ever I did."

"Why, Da?"

"He'm grown up to be sinful as you would expect with a child of sin. Haven't 'ee had trouble wi'un always wantin' to go off with the godless children from the Church Town? Didn't I wi' my own eyes see him tossin' for ha'pence with boys old in sin, down to the quay? Ay, and I beat him for it as you du know, but I can't make un' afraid of me not no how."

"He'm but a little boy," said Julia, "he do forget easily. 'T'es but natural."

"Natural!" Silas hit the table with his clenched fist so that the white china lamp globe rattled on its brass rim. "Natural! Never speak that devil's word to me. It's at the root of all sin. If he'm natural it's got to be got out of him. 'T'es natural to be wicked, 'tes natural to go down into the pit, and 'tes only natural that the son of that man and of that woman should sin."

When Julia went up to bed she looked at her little brother long and earnestly, shading the candle with her hand so that the heavy lids should not lift. Christopher John lay sprawled across the bed with the abandoned innocence of childhood, his long lashes black on his rosy cheeks, his tousled curls falling back from his white forehead, his rosy mouth just a little parted. He had still the dimpled plumpness of babyhood and looked younger than his six years while he slept. Julia lay awake that night and saw the cold pale eye of dawn stare in at her uncurtained window.

Next day she went across the moor beside her father, dragging the reluctant Christopher John by the hand, to attend a Revivalist Meeting at the ugly little four-square chapel which affronted the beauty of the skies.

Christopher John did not come well out of his ordeal. To Julia's unnaturally keyed up perceptions he seemed almost malignant in his perversity. Surely no other child drummed his heels so persistently against the under-side of the seat, or screwed his head round to stare at his acquaintances so often. And the hymns—Christopher John didn't even seem to care for the hymns although they made Julia feel as though water, either very hot or cold, were being poured gently down her spine. There were such wonderful words in the hymns. "Love" and "stars" and "flame" and "blood" and "cloud"—all words that seemed to strike through her as wind strikes through a harp. Of course, Christopher John was only a very little boy, but she saw her father's face growing steadily more sombre as Christopher John fidgeted, and gradually the awful conviction began to press upon her heart that it was not childish fidgets but inescapable sin that made Christopher John's eye so bright and side-long, and his hands and feet so restless.

The preacher mounted into the pulpit and stood with his dark eyes burning into the assembly. Pale faces, red faces, round faces, long faces—row after row of them were turned up, offered like flowers to those searching rays. For the first ten minutes Julia sat swamped, almost drowning, under the flow of words through which the light of those burning eyes came to her dimly as the sun's beams may strike through to a man under water. The words battered at her, bewildered her, rolled her over and over. She felt herself borne helplessly along upon their full flood, tossing hither and thither like a straw. Then a word here and there startled her into fuller consciousness. She caught at them as a man swept away by a strong current may catch at a drooping bough of a tree, clinging on to these words—words she had heard often before, but they had never made any impact on her soul. "Sin"—"salvation"—"hell"—not beautiful words like "love" and "cloud," but stern, strong words. She began to feel that she had hold of something solid and could watch the current go past her without the sense of suffocation. She listened attentively now, unconsciously pressing her hand so hard upon Christopher John's little rough bare knees that he ceased to fidget and, as she listened, for the first time Fear made itself known to her. She marvelled how she had been so blind as never to have seen the shape of Fear before. How had she lived so unthinkingly, merely striving to keep Christopher John in her own possession? How was it possible she had not seen that it was God to whom she must give Christopher John, if the devil were not to claim him as his own?

Everywhere, said the preacher, pitfalls lay in wait. The seemingly innocent play of a child might lead him to the brink of the lake of fire—nay, would so lead him

unless he were plucked forth. It was the age-old serpent that looked from women's eyes into the eyes of the young men who lusted after them. It was, above all, in the love for wife of husband, of the mother for child, the members of families for each other, that the insidious wiles of the Evil One were to be found. For these things made people soft, made them forget the stern hard counsels of God, that He was a jealous God who must be loved better than any human being. Love such as weak humans had amongst themselves was only too prone to make them think that there could be no hell—no undying death. It made them judge God as themselves—a shocking blasphemy; the preacher ended with quoting words which it seemed to Julia that she heard for the first time.

“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.”

Julia, faint and shaken, led Christopher John out of the chapel; his moist warm little hand seemed burning to hers, so icy was her palm.

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As day after day went by nearly always Silas and Julia managed to hear the preacher as he spoke in the highways and byways or in the scattered chapels. Everywhere black processions of people crawled over the fair face of the moorland to the appointed meeting-place. Julia's soul seemed as though caught up, suspended in some element more ethereal than water and more buoyant than air, as though it were waiting—always waiting. She did not now get that feeling of suffocation, almost of

drowning, as the torrent of words flowed over her. She breasted them consciously, they flowed around her as part of the brightness which sustained her. She lived for the preachings as the sick live for sunrise or the drunkard for alcohol, and during the day when she was not watching Christopher John, she would kneel down wherever she might happen to be and wrestle with the Almighty in prayer. Each day now she seemed to see something new that she had never suspected in Christopher John—strange glances from his eyes, secret laughter, a dark liveliness that was not hers or her father's. When she tried to take him to hear the preacher she would always find he had vanished. Where did Christopher John go when he should have been listening to the Word of God? She knew only too well that he went with the other unregenerate boys, and played pitch and toss with them in some quiet alley. Her father, she knew, was condemning Christopher John daily, yet she felt her own heart but too rebellious against the Lord. She could not be stern with Christopher John when he flung himself into her arms each evening, tousled and dirty; when she tried to fix his dark side-long eyes with her own clear gaze, and he would turn his head restlessly away like a little animal. She could not judge him harshly, his solid, sturdy little body was too beloved of her thin hungry arms.

The things of the body had seemed to suffice Julia Ann hitherto, because life had been for her a series of hard physical exertions which had left her little time or energy for the things of the spirit, and yet her love of Christopher John had not been physical. That avid eagerness of hers, and that passion for keeping him entirely as her own possession had their roots deep in her soul. Vaguely she realized so much, ignorant as she was, and all her stories of pixies and buccas and merrymaids had been wrung

from the depths of this necessity for possession and not lightly picked from the surface of the facile mind.

The thing that burned in Silas Treeve's brooding face burned also in the pale eyes of his daughter. Julia's nature, like her father's, was granite, in spite of her passionate love, and through it there bubbled up only one stream of living water. This spring, ever-renewed, had been her love for Christopher John, but now there had forced its way up into the daylight of her consciousness a more turbulent flood, and it seemed to her this second upwelling should overflow that first domestic spring. The waters of salvation should surely swamp all others as a great river swamps little streamlets that trickle into it, bearing them to the sea of God's love. Had she but been knowledgeable enough she would have known that these two forces within her came from the same spring—that all the passions if deeply enough touched rise from one point, however far apart the manifestations of them may be. Love and Hate and Killing and Compassion are but different spots on the soul's surface where the force breaks its way through.

Little recked the revivalist of such a simple truth. Life was for him a series of unrelated phenomena and the complexity of the devil was far more present to his mind than the simplicity of man.

One day, returned from the meeting, Julia walked into the farmyard during those magic moments just after sunset, when the world is transmuted into flame. The strawricks in the yard glimmered like gold—every fragile stalk burning clean and clear against the vividly green slope of the fields beyond. The puddles in the trodden yard, the very footprints the cows had left, held liquid gold, the tiny chicks that ran to meet Julia seemed blown along to her on their thin little legs like balls of light, and beside the

gate the catkins of the drooping alder hung motionless in the air as the flakes of fire on the brows of the Apostles at the first Whitsun. And there blew across Julia's mind the memory of her father's words as the reflection of flames may play across a vacant wall—"the Spirit would burn through the land like the gorse at swaling time. . . ."

She stood still a moment rapt in the glow, and a rising tide of excitement welled up through her whole being. Water and light seemed the same element—tides that brimmed you to the soul's lip. She was blessed indeed to have been born when she had, so that she could experience this great revival of God's Word. . . . And on the rush of that gratitude thought of Christopher John was borne along naturally to her heart. She looked round eagerly and called his name. There was no answer. She no longer saw the glow of the Spirit over the trodden farmyard. She crossed it swiftly, looking to right and left, then thought she heard low voices. She turned an angle of the stack and there on a shelf that had been cut out in it, she saw Christopher John lying with Benjamin Jacka, the cow-man's son. They had not heard her approach and they were whispering and giggling, heads together, cheeks flushed. She caught a fragment of their conversation before they were aware of her presence.

"That's how everything is barn," Jacka's Benjamin was saying. "If 'ee hadna been kept so close by that girt girl you'd have knawn that sure enough—that's what your Da did and my Da and everyone's Da——"

The golden light of the farmyard turned to flame and then to a red mist which, for a moment, blotted out the visible world for Julia Ann. Her nails ate into her palms. She struggled to retain her consciousness through an awful space of time in which she saw that the red glow was

the glare of hell blown across and across by smoke. She prayed fiercely and gradually the farmyard shook and reeled about her once more, the familiar objects of it becoming visible—as in a mad dance, then settling in their accustomed places about her.

Christopher John's face was now the reddest thing she saw as he tried to evade her eyes. Julia did not scold him—she never scolded. Her fierceness was either a storm before which Christopher John felt paralysed, or else she unexpectedly swept him to her breast, but there was no nagging about her methods—if such uncertain treatments can be called methods.

Jacka's Benjamin went off blubbering with two reddened, tingling cheeks, but she did not lay hand to Christopher John except to pick him up and run with him into the house as though a fiend were after him.

She questioned him when she put him to bed, but met with only sullen reluctant replies. Christopher John thought she was silly and all but said so. Of course he talked about things—all the boys talked about things—but she was only a girl.

"But it's wickedness, Christopher John. You must keep yourself clean from the lusts of the flesh."

It was a phrase that meant nothing to Christopher John. He had not yet advanced to these things, but Julia thought he had, or at least that his feet were set upon that broad and flowery path which led to sin. Perhaps it was natural, but then to be natural was to be wicked and—dread thought that was always gnawing like an imprisoned rat at the back of her mind—perhaps it was from sin that Christopher John had sprung.

She held him down in bed, a hand on each shoulder, and stared into his reluctant eyes. He turned his head away from her, rolling it petulantly upon the pillow; and sud-

denly, as she looked at those dark and dewy eyes that refused to meet her own, at the out-thrust underlip, at those rounded cheeks bloomy as rosy fruit, deliciously wet still with his tears, something within her melted.

For one awful moment that shook her to look back upon, she hated God because she knew that Christopher John stood against God. She gathered him to her and stared over his rough head at the darkening square of sky. He submitted, bored but glad of the change, and for a while, they stayed still in the dim little room. But it was a fearsome Julia who laid the sleepy boy back on his pillow and crept down the little stairway.

Christopher John was now not only in danger of losing his own soul but of losing hers. She could not deny that for those few fierce moments she had hated God, because of Christopher John.

.

The days slipped by and it seemed to Julia as though their speed had altered. She felt as she had once before when she went on the merry-go-round at Helston on Flora Day. At first she had liked the gentle motion of the horses that went up and down rhythmically as they swept round and round, but gradually the electric piano had played faster and faster and the horses and swans and dolphins and galloping pigs had swept round faster and faster until the crowd standing around, that had begun by being an assembly of friendly faces, had become blurred streaks of colour, and all of life had been fused in one terrifying sense of violence. That was how life was behaving now, getting quicker and quicker, more and more livid, more and more terrifying. Even the spring—that wonderful pale spring of the West that she had always loved—now held a terrifying quality. The petals

of the gorse blended into a violent rush of yellow that typified the flames of hell. Like yellow ribbon it sped past her, hardening into a gold band that pressed about her mind. Sunset and dawn held the menace of fire. The far stars were pitiless as crystal.

Until the revivalist had come, life had been compact of everyday things to Julia. Getting up—going to bed. Chill dark dawns—daylight evenings. The smell of bacon—the sight of familiar faces set about by best clothes on a Sunday. The sweet smell of the cow's breath—the rounded faintly warm whiteness of new laid eggs. The sudden violences of pig and chicken-killing, wringing out of the peaceful air cries of fear that rent it with a sound like the tearing of silk. Warm greasy water. Cold water that roughened her hands. An aching across the small of her back. The smell of Christopher John's muddy clothes when she took them off him for the last time of the week on a Saturday night—the smell of the clean clothes she laid out for him and her father and herself. The recurring promise of spring like a smile breaking out on a sad face, the golden fulfilment of summer—the warm wet rainy winters. Harvest Home with cider and pasties and rough, jesting, kindly voices, and the air dancing with the golden chaff, writhing like dust motes in a sunbeam about the threshing machine. Of these things had been the stuff of life, all shot through as by a taut gold thread of gold by the fact of Christopher John's existence. Now this was altered. She loved him as much as ever—more than ever—but the perfecting of love had brought fear.

She found herself less and less able to thrust into the back of her mind the knowledge of that conversation between Christopher John and Jacka's Benjamin. Dreadfully, as the merry-go-round swept past her, life became

more and more like coloured bands revolving round her head. It was borne in upon her that Christopher John was damned. He was the son of a dark-complexioned foreigner, the chance-fruit of a gross and sinful passion indulged amidst the heather. He had in him the seeds of eternal destruction. How could he, if he lived to grow up, escape that doom?

She found herself wishing passionately, in spite of the terrible sense of empty arms that even thought of such a thing gave to her, that Christopher John had died in infancy and gone straight to heaven. He was still, in spite of Jacka's Benjamin, but a child, and God, if He would gather him to His breast now, would not be hard on him. But Christopher John was a sturdy healthy little boy. He caught no childish diseases—he never had so much as a cold. Life was urgent in his veins. Perhaps it was even possible that the devil, anxious that Christopher John should not escape him by dying in infancy, watched over his upbringing and kept physical harm away from him.

Julia found herself more and more unable to play with the little boy—to beguile him with stories. She had never wanted so desperately to keep him for herself and she had never found it so impossible even to attract his attention. It seemed to her that he now definitely avoided not only the menace of prayer-meetings but even those lighter hours when she had been wont to amuse him without a thought for his soul. She had even caught a look of fear in the soft dark eyes that now would never meet her own. Horrible that Christopher John should fear her! And yet was it not natural that evil should fear righteousness?

Julia never thought of herself as holy. She knew but too well she was a miserable sinner whose carnal affec-

tions had already once set her rocking on the very lip of the pit. But she knew, too, that she stood for the powers of heaven as Christopher John stood—she feared only too deeply—for the powers of hell. He was no more wicked than she was holy but he had in him so firmly set the roots of wickedness that she more than feared, she was beginning to be certain, of what was bound to happen.

The preacher was about to leave, having saved the whole of that country-side. He was going on to the mining districts where folks' souls were even tougher. He was to hold one more meeting in a great natural amphitheatre which lay about a mile inland from Baker's Fury—a vast basin of green slopes rimmed with gorse that burned against the sky. A huge outcropping boulder thrust itself from out the side of the amphitheatre like a tongue of stone and on this the preacher was to stand.

Gradually in Julia's mind this last preaching assumed the dimensions of a portent. It seemed to her a test by which Christopher John's life should stand or fall. Smaller children than he had felt the onrushing of the Spirit at the revivalist meeting, had felt the conviction of sin and been saved.

Christopher John appeared to hate salvation. He shied away from it like an unbroken colt. Julia kept him close to her all through that day and when the time came she firmly washed his face, put round his reluctant neck that clean collar without which it was not meet he should present himself before the Lord, and firmly gripping him by the hand, set off between him and her father to the place of preaching.

It was a tender evening of faint still sunlight and quiet air. As they passed the big field Jacka was still busy ploughing and the great red-brown slope curved like a breast against the sky, and behind the plough the golden-

white gulls made a flickering of pale flame. The preaching place was girdled with a black band of folk against its emerald turf and the sunlight lay bright along the upper surface of the out-thrust rock. Upon it the figure of the preacher looked small and black, even his face dark against the luminous sky.

That evening the preacher wrestled as never before. Julia Ann saw the great semi-circle of intent faces with the reflected glow of the red sunset full upon them, as though they were the little flames of lamps set about a great shelf. Even her father's habitual pallor was lit up from within so that his waxen face glowed as though transparent. Men, women and children—even the most stubborn who had held out till now—came forward to the penitents' bench, a row of granite boulders set below the thrusting rock. Sobs and ejaculations rose through the still air from the floor of the amphitheatre like bubbles rising to the surface of a pool. Julia Ann tugged at Christopher John's arm.

"Christopher John, Christopher John! Go forward and be saved! Du 'ee hear me, Christopher John?"

He tugged away from her and kept his eyes fixed upon the turf at his feet.

"Christopher John—Christopher John! Don't 'ee hear the preacher calling on 'ee to be saved?"

Christopher John's eyes like the eyes of a hunted rabbit went from side to side. He caught sight of a lark, sublimely heedless both of salvation and of sin, quivering in the air above him.

"Christopher John—Christopher John! Will 'ee hear the voice of the Lard? It's now you'm got to be saved, Christopher John!"

Christopher John was listening to the lark's cries. She was not singing with a lark's usual ecstasy—those

beautiful little short almond-shaped notes that are like gorse blossoms tossing through the air. She was uttering little cries.

"Her nest's hereabouts," whispered Christopher John earnestly. "We'm on it perhaps. She's afeared for the little ones. Don't 'ee hear her?"

What was it to Julia Ann if a nest of larks were trampled under foot? A fear for something far more precious almost choked her utterance.

"Christopher John, won't 'ee listen? It's Julia what loves 'ee—what wouldn't let nawthen hurt 'ee— won't 'ee be saved, Christopher John?"

And then Christopher John turned and faced her—let his beautiful dark eyes fly to hers for one brief moment—the first for many weeks.

"I hate that little black man," he said. "I think he du look silly up there. I hate him. And I hate these girt folk what have killed the little birds—and I hate 'ee, Julia Ann, and I wish you'd lave me be!"

Julia Ann expected the heavens to strike him with lightning—and looked up—to see the preacher's hand pointing straight in her direction.

"There's a young sinner what hasn't repented. Sister, you'm saved—why don't you bring your little brother as an offering to the Lard?"

Julia began to drag Christopher John forward. He struggled backwards and dug the iron heels of his hard little boots into the turf at every step.

"That ain't no good, sister!" bawled the preacher. "No one can come to the Lard by farce. He'm young in years but I fear me he'm old in sin!" And the preacher dropped on his knees upon the end of the rock and buried his face in his hands.

Julia turned and ran blindly from the amphitheatre, still

clutching Christopher John by the hand. He went with her willingly enough now her feet were turned away from the hated place.

As the two children struggled over the crest of the circle, Julia sent one despairing glance backwards over her shoulder and the rock looked like a derisive tongue stuck out of a great opened mouth. She ran blindly over the moorland, stumbling over the ruts, splashing her Sunday frock with water, tearing it upon the gorse bushes, but never letting go of Christopher John's little hand.

She ran on until the breath failed her and she heard Christopher John sobbing. Then she slackened to a walk but still clutched him and still stared straight ahead. He tried to tug his hand away as he went, but Julia Ann's strength was as the strength of many men that evening.

She dragged him on past the gate, past the farmyard—always on. Twilight had overtaken them. The farmhouse, dumb and blind—for no one was within to light the lamp or set the door ajar—glimmered like a ghost house through the darkening air. Julia and Christopher John stumbled over the short turf that stretched below the farm.

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An hour later Silas came home. The preacher had gone—all the souls were saved. The amphitheatre lay trampled and deserted. The lark had found her stricken nest. Silas opened the door of the house—found no lamp lit, no supper laid—and went out calling through the yard.

It was not until the grey of dawn that his search led him to the edge of the blowhole where Julia sat, her knees drawn up and her chin in her hands, watching as each gust of air and spray blew up into the paling air, to see the soul of Christopher John, saved by her, come toss-

ing up towards heaven from those yeasty depths into which she had consigned his frantic body.

She kept her elbows closely together, for her arms felt empty, but her large light eyes were staring expectantly at the pale wreaths of foam that shot up and sank again.

She did not turn her head as her father and Jacka came up behind her, but she seemed to know they were there and she said, striving to keep the beginnings of fear out of her voice: "It'll be all right. I saved his soul, I did. 'Tis only there hasn't been time for 'un to come up yet." And she clutched some blades of grass and flung them over the mouth of the blowhole so that they danced about like thin green flames for the moment, while she called softly: "Christopher John—Christopher John! You'm saved now!—come up, Christopher John."

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“W.J.”

I

So easily dissatisfied with achieved results are some persons that a journalist, writing in 1975, referred to the war of 1966-1972 as “a mere pothouse brawl compared with the interplanetary struggle which, if the science of levitation progresses at its present rate, must inevitably, and far sooner than most people imagine . . .” etc. etc.

Still, for a mundane tussle, this clash between the white and yellow races was sufficiently devastating. If we examine the casualties of the black races we find that these alone equalled the total casualties in the war of 1914-1918; yet the blacks entered late into the fight, taking up a reasonable share of the white man’s burden only under pressure, and with a very real reluctance.

The fecundity of the African, and simple mode of living, enabled him to recover far more quickly than his white brother, whether in Europe or in America. Neither of these continents, indeed, regained till the decade preceding the war of 2021-2026 anything like the prosperity which had been its portion during the decade preceding the war of 1966-1972.

For various reasons, too tedious to claim inclusion in

this narrative, the purchasing power of the pound sterling in the critical decade after the war of 1966-1972 diminished far less than the purchasing power of the mark, the lira, the French franc, and, of course, the dollar. As, however, it diminished sufficiently to make life in England unsatisfactory to persons of limited means, many citizens of that country repaired to the Continent, preferring comfort in exile to a straitened existence at home.

One such exile was Miss Elizabeth Taylor who, on a Thursday afternoon early in the May of 1975 might have been observed in the station at Munich, nay! actually was observed, by a porter, unobtrusively seeking the platform for Andernach.

The porter swiftly balanced probabilities. An elderly spinster, and so likely to be mean; but from England, that was clear, and amiable in appearance. He hastened towards her and addressed her in English.

She laughed nervously, and confided that her luggage was in the cloak-room. She had arrived by air from London that morning, and was going on to Andernach by the 4:53.

"What a polite obliging man!" thought Miss Taylor, as she leaned out of the window to tip him. "A corner seat and a carriage all to myself!"

She handed him his tip. He surveyed it with sour disillusionment.

"Oh, I'm sure it isn't enough," she quavered under her breath. "Mr.—!" she called after him.

He turned back.

"A mistake. . . . I meant to . . . Please!"

She pressed a bundle of small paper money into his hand. He smiled; she sighed with relief, and sank back into her corner seat.

For some time she looked out of the window, gasping



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in delight at the steep-roofed farmhouses, with their overhanging eaves. Yes! This was Dürer's country, indeed! How rich, those farms, how secure! . . . full of earthy poetry . . . monuments of ancient well-being . . . symbols of Teuton strength and geniality . . . yet touched with the pathos of time . . . last strongholds of antique simplicity in an age of change, conflict and confusion.

“Last strongholds of antique simplicity. . .” Miss Taylor repeated this and the preceding phrases several times to fix them for use either in a letter home or in that book—novel or travel sketches—which was to be the fruit and justification of this adventurous journey.

But now her mood changed. The enthrallment of the Düreresque landscape faded. She felt lonely and frightened, like a child. Oh, dear, dear Golder's Green! How infinitely remote it was! Why, why had she ever left it for these wild outlandish regions?

There is a school of thought which traces all human actions to economic causes. The disciples of this school prefer the freedom of poverty to well-paid jobs, and allow no economic considerations to interfere with the duty of preaching that man is actuated by economic considerations alone. In conformity with the teaching of these devoted men, I have implied that Miss Taylor left England in search of cheap living, but I am now compelled to adulterate the pure doctrine of economic determinism with foreign matter.

Miss Taylor supplemented a small private income by writing. Her second novel, “Mary: The Story of a Plain Woman,” had quite a success, and a number of women all over England added her name to the list of authors whose latest book their libraries were required to supply. Now a novel, now a record of rambles in Old

London, now a collection of essays on the quieter aspects of England in war-time appeared at regular intervals, keeping up the mild demand for her work. But since the conclusion of the war the cost of living had mounted rapidly, her last book, though it had sold well, dissatisfied her, and she began to feel the need at once of economy and of something fresh to write about.

Her thoughts turned to the Continent, but none of her friends was free to leave England for longer than a month at a time, and how could she go alone?

Then one day that circular arrived. "*That* circular," so in retrospect she now termed it, filled with sickly amaze at the enthusiasm it had roused in her three weeks ago, as she sat at breakfast in her Golder's Green flat.

"Continental Comfort, Limited"—"Limited"! The suggestiveness of the word! Yet at the time she had missed it.

She pulled the circular out of her handbag, and, though she knew it by heart, read it through again.

"The general impoverishment of the country due to the War," so ran the circular, "has resulted in a decrease of the purchasing power of the paper pound.

"People living comfortably enough in 1966 on definitely settled revenues now find themselves with less than half their effective pre-war income. Their ranks have been added to by numbers of disabled officers and their dependants.

" 'Continental Comfort, Limited' has been formed to enable people of limited means once more to lead a life worth living and well within their income.

"A representative of the Company has just returned from a lengthy tour of exploration in France, Germany and Italy. Owing to a variety of factors, living in certain

districts of these countries was found to cost less than at home.

1. Foodstuffs are home-grown, NOT imported.
2. Producers sell direct to the consumer, thus eliminating middlemen's profits.
3. The lower rate of exchange counteracts the increased cost of living, in effect bringing it down for Englishmen to the 1966 standard.

"It may be stated definitely that, *provided one knows where to go*, life at the rate of £150 per annum is possible, on a scale of comfort and food totally out of proportion to what the same thing would cost at home."

Arrangements, the circular continued, had been made with Country Houses, Châteaux and Private Residences, in Northern Italy, Touraine (France) and Southern Germany, to receive clients of the Company as paying guests: the total cost of lodging, service and food ranging from £150 per annum, Class A (*pro rata* for shorter periods. Minimum stay, One Month), to £275 per annum, Class D.

Solicitors' and Bankers' references were required from each client.

Miss Taylor replaced the circular in her bag. She felt slightly reassured: there was, after all, an air about it. Too much air, perhaps? "Hot air" as her Army uncle used to say?

Her visits to the offices of "Continental Comfort" had left in her mind an almost unconscious misgiving, and this misgiving now began to swell and torment her. The offices themselves were situated in the very respectable

quarter of Leicester Square. A lover of the past, Miss Taylor regretted the Empire and the Alhambra, which, with many other notable landmarks of pre-war London, such as the Crystal Palace and the Y. M. C. A. headquarters in Tottenham Court Road, had been blown to pieces by Japanese airmen in the famous Fourth Bombardment. It hurt her that the statue of Shakespeare, which once had gazed with thoughtful approval at the blazing lights of the Empire, should be compelled to bestow the same tolerant benediction, now touched with fatuity, on the premises of Bastard's Non-Alcoholic Intoxicants.

Still, she could not criticize the offices of "Continental Comfort" on the score of style or of situation. What she had felt on the occasion of her first visit, helplessly, and now felt resentfully, was the way in which Mr. Theodore Melmoth, the managing director, had—well! submerged her.

A curiously intense man, with those large horn-rimmed spectacles, through which he projected so mesmeric a glare.

He had come round the table at which he was sitting, bowed with severe dignity, and waved her into a chair—"Please! Please!"

Her submission to this entreaty to seat herself seemed to reassure him. Claspings his hands and resting them on the table he gazed at her with the air of a man who had got a difficult situation well in hand.

"I have come about this circular," she murmured. "I wonder if . . ."

"Precisely. . . ." A monologue began, lasting about fifteen minutes, at the end of which he decided that she had decided in favour of Southern Germany against Northern Italy or Touraine, and in favour of Schloss

Bardenstein, near Andernach, against the other castles and private residences controlled by "Continental Comfort" in that quarter of the world.

"You are quite sure the people you have already sent there are . . ." she hesitated, searching for a tactful epithet.

"Quite exceptionally charming and congenial people, Miss . . . ?"

"Taylor."

". . . Miss Taylor. I have interviewed them all personally."

"Oh," weakly, "you have interviewed them all personally."

"Personally," in a firm voice. "And you understand, of course, that in each case references were submitted. This is not a mere form. All references are taken up, and if they fail to satisfy our Committee, the persons in question are notified that we cannot accommodate them. You will realize that we owe this precaution to the various proprietors who have placed their residences at our disposal. And in pursuance of precisely the same policy of complete candour we submit to the client detailed information about whatever house he proposes to visit.

"In regard to your own references, my dear lady, I have no doubt at all . . ." He lifted and dropped his clasped hands; a sudden smile gleamed at her. "But we cannot waive this condition in any particular instance. You will understand."

"Oh, of course . . . most essential . . . naturally."

The telephone rang. He snatched up the receiver. "Mr. Melmoth speaking . . . Helen? . . . yes, simply swamped . . . pouring in all day . . . ring me up again twelve-thirty, meanwhile I place myself at your feet . . . all my homages."

He put back the receiver. "Ah, I had forgotten. A very important stipulation, to which, Miss Taylor, I have not yet drawn your attention, is contained in Clause 12 of our contract. It bears most vitally on this question of the society in which you will find yourself."

Mr. Melmoth laid a contract form on the table, opened it, smoothed it, handed another form to Miss Taylor, indicated Clause 12, and leaning well forward made a due pause. Then slowly and with careful articulation, he read out:

"The proprietor agrees under penalty of a fine of five pounds sterling for each several breach of the stipulation contained in this clause not to receive into his house as guest or paying guest or member of indoor staff or outdoor staff or otherwise any citizen or naturalized citizen of any of the following countries namely: Japan, China, the United States of Arabia, the United States of India excluding Ceylon, Siam, the Confederation of Peru, the Persian Empire, the Turkish Empire, Bulgaria, the Revillagigedo Islands and the Siberian Republic."

He leant back and regarded Miss Taylor, who murmured inarticulate admiration.

"Tolerably comprehensive, I think," he said. "There was some question, Miss Taylor, as to whether we should insist on the exclusion of Euro-Russians. But I felt strongly, and the rest of our Committee eventually came round to my view, that it would be both unwise and ungenerous (Miss Taylor lowered her eyes, unable to sustain the intensity of his gaze)—both unwise and ungenerous to include the Euro-Russian in the catalogue of our ex-enemies. The Russian Revolution was pro-Ally in sentiment. Petrograd changed its name to St. Petersburg two weeks before our armies reached it, and

the Kingdom of Euro-Russia has chosen a German prince for its first Monarch." ¹

"Do you quarrel with my position?"

"Oh dear, no!"

But in her present mood the grandiose irrelevance of Clause 12 seemed to Miss Taylor symptomatic of an unreality in the whole business. This castle in the Bavarian Highlands, this Baron Adalbert von Neiderhofen ("You will find him a most charming host. He is, of course, very much 'born,' one of the oldest families in Bavaria. He impressed me most favourably"), this selected group of charming and congenial fellow-countrymen—did they exist, were they at this very moment actually *there*?

Miss Taylor looked out of the window . . . a fat priest strolling across a field, pear and cherry trees in blossom, the long shadows of late afternoon, and many miles away a glowing, snow-covered range of mountains . . . her face relaxed, the lines of worry and suspicion vanished, and her brown eyes filled with tears. She gazed out in a rapture too intense for phrasemaking. Never had she seen anything so beautiful.

¹ The Poet Laureate celebrated this event in *The Times*, November 16, 1971. The verses, unsatisfying as poetry, have a certain historical interest, and are perhaps worth quoting.

"TO A TEUTON PRINCE"

"Even as a careful painter doth o'erpaint
A tint that's faulty or a line that's bad,
So Teuton wit expels the Mongol taint,
St. Petersburg erases Petrograd.

"Oh, fair and true and tender is the North!
And yellow, fierce and fickle is the East!
Go forth, O noble Teuton Prince, go forth!
Essay and subjugate the Mongol Beast!"

II

"What a dear he is!" cried Frau Dernberger.

Cyril Smith heard the exclamation as he walked away from the little group down the avenue. He knew they were looking after him, and a curious stiffness pervaded his limbs and body. It was painful, the distinctness with which he visualized them, Frau Dernberger rocking her baby, pretty Marie, her sister, a hand on her slender hip, and old Frau Schreiner, grandmother and great-grandmother. The girl and the young woman were standing, the old woman was sitting on the bench, smiling vaguely, her wrinkled hands crossed on her lap.

This stiff awkward feeling! How idiotic to be so self-conscious! He walked jerkily, on his heels, like an old man whose limbs are no longer in perfect communication with the brain. To dispel his stiffness he whistled, but the stiffness was not dispelled. Stooping he picked up a stone, aimed carefully at a beech tree, and missed it. Still this stiffness! He kicked at a twig and all but fell over his feet. "Damn!" The dryness of his lips interfered with his whistling. He tried to hum and blushed at the croaking noise.

A bend in the avenue hid him from the castle, and the stiffness vanished, yielding to an exquisite sense of light and supple ease. An unmusical but cheerful noise welled from his throat. He bounded forward and ran till his breath was spent.

Presently he sobered down and began to think of Marie. He was glad that Frau Dernberger had called him "a dear" in front of Marie. Frau Dernberger was grateful to him, of course, for offering to meet Miss Taylor at the station; and, apart from this, as the ingenuous youth well knew, he was useful in a hundred ways to the

much-tried housekeeper at Schloss Bardenstein. Knowing no English, Frau Dernberger was always employing him as her intermediary with the Waldens, and Victor Bull, and Mr. Fleet, and even with "W.J."; for though "W.J." knew German, Frau Dernberger disliked and was rather afraid of him, and avoided him as much as possible. What he needed, she often said, was a wife with a will of her own to keep him in order.

But it was not of his usefulness to Frau Dernberger that young Smith was now thinking. Before setting out for the station, a few minutes previously, he had taken the infant Dernberger from his mother, and rocked him gently.

The mother had exclaimed with delight, Marie said nothing but gazed at him as she had often done of late, and old Frau Schreiner suddenly began to smile. Words were rare from her. She was eighty-four years old, and had outlived her own three children. Her two grandsons had been killed in the war, and her granddaughter's husband, Herr Dernberger, had died since. So far as she lived at all, it was in memories of the war of 1914, and of her youth beyond that war, and a little in her great-grandchild.

"Ah, how gently he would hold a young girl!" she murmured suddenly. "I know these young Englishmen."

Marie crimsoned, and swayed involuntarily towards him; Smith, too, blushed, handed the baby back to Frau Dernberger, and made off.

Eighteen miles to the south, as he walked towards Andernach, stretched the Karwendel range, on whose summits the winter snow had not yet melted, and beyond was Tyrol, and beyond Tyrol, Italy. To his right, two hundred feet below, lay the lake of Andernach, a little over two miles long, bordered on the opposite shore by

low hills. The road he was following diverged slightly to the left, down to the village, thirty-five minutes' walk from Schloss Bardenstein.

"Oh, the world, the world!" cried Smith, gazing at the mountains, brown and warm in the setting sun. The words of the old woman seemed to him an omen, a blessing, a promise of infinite happiness. Marie swaying . . . and the sun and the lake and the mountains, and rushing streams, and other lands . . . other lands! Faces, wistful with long waiting, pale and exquisite! He flung out his arms towards the world.

A peasant approaching regarded Smith with dull misgiving. Smith feigned trouble with a too tightly fitting coat and continued to exercise his arms, not very convincingly.

The train from Munich, now visible in the distance, provided an excuse for flight, and he tore down the road, arriving at the station hot and dishevelled.

Three or four villagers were getting out. It was easy to distinguish Miss Taylor among them. He advanced, breathing hard and embarrassed.

"Excuse me! Are you Miss Taylor? My name is Cyril Smith. I've come to meet you. I'm stopping at the Schloss."

"How very kind! Really most kind!" Miss Taylor was confused with gratitude.

The business of collecting her luggage and transferring it to the decrepit Schloss car put them both more at their ease. Smith suggested that they should walk instead of driving, and soon they were talking quite easily.

"Are you the author, I mean the authoress, of 'Mary: The Story of . . .'" Smith hesitated and blushed. " 'The Story of a Plain Woman'?"

"Do you mean to say you have read it? How nice of you!"

"I thought it might be you. It's very true to . . . it's very sincere, I mean . . . I liked it very much."

"How nice of you!"

There was an uneasy silence. Miss Taylor knew that at a first meeting she was disappointing both in her looks and her talk. She wished she could accept praise of her work more easily and gracefully.

Smith had guessed she would be plain. But she was much plainer than he had expected, small and thin, a reddish nose, mouse-coloured straight hair. A fascinating ugliness, he had hoped for, a voluptuous irregularity of feature, set off by a supple figure.

Miss Taylor, however, thought him the most charming boy in the world, so tall, such a nice complexion, and blue eyes and thick brown hair: hands and feet rather large—he hadn't grown into them yet: still a little clumsy, but a dear!

Presently she broke the silence. "What is the Baron at the Schloss like, Mr. Smith?"

"Oh, he's all right, but he's not here now, of course—went to Capri three weeks ago, just after the Tecklenborgs arrived, two girls and a mother. He can't stand women, told me so himself, and, besides, I don't think he liked seeing his house turned into a sort of hotel, though Madame Tecklenborg says he's not much to boast of, bought his title during the war, and then lost most of his money speculating.

"Anyway, it certainly didn't suit him here. I turned up on the 3rd of April, and the Waldens, Bull, Fleet and 'W.J.' at intervals in the next few days, and the Baron chucked up the sponge on the 14th. Pretty quick work!"

Miss Taylor, a practised listener, kept spurring Smith

on by a series of nods, and curious little sounds, denoting interest, amusement or concern. Smith began to warm to it.

"Still, he really wasn't a bad sort. He was always very decent to me, but he seemed to lose his temper rather easily. He had a row with 'W.J.', who cursed him for overcharging for baths, but then anyone might have a row with 'W.J.' And he had a row with Major Walden, but then Major Walden was crabbing the German Air Force. And, of course, he had a fearful row with Victor Bull, but it was enough to annoy anyone, bellowing up and down the corridors at one in the morning! Of course, Bull was very tight, had drunk a lot, you know, but that's not exactly an excuse.

"Oh, and there was some unpleasantness between the Baron and Mr. Fleet. The Baron said all journalists were born liars, and improved with practice. He speaks English perfectly. Of course, he didn't know Mr. Fleet was a journalist, but that led to rather an awkward scene. Mr. Fleet can be extremely cutting in a quiet way."

"Well, really! I think it's just as well the Baron's left. But the managing director in London, Mr. Melmoth, you know, told me . . ."

"Oh, Crumpet!"

"Crumpet?"

"Yes, that's what we call him—a sort of abbreviation of Continental Comfort. I must say I rather liked him myself, though he talks a lot of rot, theosophy and that sort of thing; says everyone's got an 'aura,' a halo, you know, which shows their real character. We had lunch together the day I called for my tickets, and he'd left all his money in his overcoat in the office, so I paid.

"But the other people here are awfully sick with him.

They say he's misrepresented everything, and yesterday, Fleet, Walden and Bull began a joint letter which is going to take the skin off his back, according to Bull. Crumpet told Bull there was fly-fishing here, and all kinds of shooting, especially chamois. Of course, there isn't any fly-fishing, and as for the chamois, they're about twenty miles away and thousands of feet up. Walden, Fleet and Bull did get up a party about a fortnight ago, and took a guide, but they never got near a chamois, and Bull was so fed up he shot a goat on the way home. There was a dickens of a row, and Bull had to pay compensation and a huge fine. And when they got back that evening, Fleet and 'W.J.' nearly came to blows. Fleet's awfully good at pulling people's legs—he does it so seriously—and he described to 'W.J.' how they'd shot a boar that was suck . . . that was nursing its young, and how the young boars howled and whimpered round their dead dam, and 'W.J.' swore at him and said no wonder the world was in a mess when so-called civilized men did that sort of thing. Leagues of Nations, he yelled, what was the use of Leagues of Nations? The new one would peter out just as the old one did. Men were brutes and would never be anything else. Of course, when he found out his leg was being pulled he got sicker than ever, and there was a general bust-up.

"Since then he sits alone at lunch and dinner, and the Waldens, Bull and Fleet have a table to themselves. We used all to sit at the long table, which is now used only for breakfast. I think the present arrangement is really more satisfactory, and I wanted to ask if you'd sit with us, Madame Tecklenborg, her two daughters, and me. Er—Madame Tecklenborg asked me to suggest it."

"Really, Mr. Smith, it's too kind of you. Of course, I shall be delighted. Are you staying long?"

"Till the end of June. That makes three months. I'm up at Oxford, and people who read modern languages get off a term in their first year, so that they can spend six months in Germany and France, or wherever the countries are. I'm going to France in July. It's a sound scheme. They introduced it after the war, but they're thinking of dropping it next year. Hullo! There is 'W.J.' That's his sunset seat."

Smith pointed to a bench a hundred yards ahead of them, which commanded a view of the lake, and, through a depression in the hills opposite, of the undulating westward-stretching country beyond. A man was sitting on the bench with crossed legs and folded arms.

"But who *is* 'W.J.'?" murmured Miss Taylor.

"I'll tell you in a minute," Smith whispered.

The enforced silence as they drew nearer invested the seated figure with a kind of mystery. Miss Taylor noted with awe the high projecting forehead, the bushy eyebrows, the large mouth, clean-shaven, and turned down at the corners. A very small man, hardly over five feet, as far as Miss Taylor could judge.

He seemed as though sunk in a final abstraction, beyond hope and beyond despair; but as they came up to him he started violently, and glared at them for an instant, fear and suspicion in his large hazel-coloured eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Gleg," quavered Smith.

Gleg shook his head impatiently, as though a fly had settled on his nose. Smith and Miss Taylor passed by in trepidation.

"Not over-courteous, is he?" questioned Smith, bitterly.

"Poor man!" Miss Taylor sighed. "He looks so unhappy. But do tell me about him, Mr. Smith, and why do you call him 'W.J.'?"

"Oh, that's short for the Wandering Jew. One night,

before we sat at separate tables, he came into dinner rather drunk. I must say it was the only time I've seen him like that. Until that night I thought he was a total abstainer. Anyway, instead of sitting glum as he generally does, he started telling us all that he was a genius, and that he was writing a masterpiece called 'The Wandering Jew,' which would beat anything that had ever been written, and contained the last word on morals and religion, and war, women, politics, and so forth.

"Well, no one knew how to take this for about half a minute, and then Bull started puffing at him, in a funny sort of mock-pompous mock-heroic way he has—' 'Pon my soul, Mr. Gleg, these are brave words! Pouf—pouf—whoever heard the like?' and Mrs. Walden tried to say something cutting, but Fleet just said, 'Who's the lucky publisher?' and that started Mr. Gleg off in the most extraordinary way. He said the whole world was against him. He was hated and persecuted by everyone, and he was short and ugly and a laughing stock.

" 'D'you know my Christian names?' he cried. 'Douglas Ferdinand! Ha, ha! Born on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, and called after those mighty heroes, Haig and Foch! Good God, even my names are ludicrous!' and then his tone altered, and he swore he'd win a mightier victory than any uniformed nincompoop sending vermin to destruction, and that drew Major Walden. He wanted to know what the devil Gleg meant by calling better men than himself vermin, and they yelled at each other, and suddenly Gleg burst into tears and rushed out of the room.

"It was very awkward at meals the next day or two, and then came the row between Fleet and 'W.J.', which led to us splitting up and sitting at different tables, and a good job, too!

"I dare say he's quite a decent sort really, and perhaps it's rather caddish calling him 'W.J.', but the name's stuck. I'd like to talk to him, but I funk trying. He's so jumpy."

They were approaching Schloss Bardenstein, a rambling three-storeyed building, deprived by frequent alterations of whatever formidable appearance it might once have possessed. It looked to Miss Taylor very charming and peaceful in the setting sun.

"I'll find Frau Dernberger and introduce her to you," said Smith. "She's the housekeeper and a very good sort."

"Really, Mr. Smith, you are *too* kind. I don't know what would have happened to me without you."

"Oh, not at all!" Smith blushed, yet was secretly aware that Miss Taylor had cause to be grateful.

Virtue and self-importance inflated him: he walked rather heavily.

A stoutish man, of twenty-nine or thirty, with a tooth-brush moustache, full lips, and a heavy truculent manner strolled out of the Schloss, smoking a cigarette.

"Ha! The studious Smith!" he growled. "Composing an ode to the setting sun, perchance?"

"Perchance not," muttered Smith, sulkily.

"Perchance not! A pretty answer! Perchance not!"

He caught sight of Miss Taylor behind Smith, removed his cigarette from his lips, and drew himself up stiffly.

"An introduction, Smith!" he whispered.

"Oh, Miss Taylor, this is Mr. Bull."

"Charmed!" said Bull. "Charmed!" and bowed low.

III

Miss Taylor was very nervous as she came down to dinner; wondering if Madame Tecklenborg and the

daughters would resent her intrusion. It was clearly Mr. Smith who had suggested inviting her to their table.

The dining-room, a long room with two bay windows, was empty. Miss Taylor hurried across and took refuge within one of the window recesses. The lake, smooth in the evening light, and the warm pines on the encircling slopes soothed her.

She was roused by a clear voice.

“May I introduce myself, Miss Taylor? Mr. Smith has told me you are giving us the pleasure of your society. I am Louise Tecklenborg. Shall we sit down? This is our table, and that table by the other window belongs to Major Walden and his party. Do please sit down, Miss Taylor! You will be very much tired after your journey.”

“How beautifully you speak English!” Miss Taylor exclaimed.

“Well, mother, Hilda and I were in England for three years during the war. Ah, here is my mother and Hilda.”

The introductions completed, and her poise regained, Miss Taylor began to take stock of the Tecklenborgs. She noticed a certain resemblance between the mother and her two daughters. All three were sallow-complexioned, with dark hair and eyes. But the differences were equally marked. Madame Tecklenborg was stout and rather stupid-looking, amiable in a tired fashion. Hilda, a girl of eighteen, was very thin and restless—“sly,” Miss Taylor thought. Louise was immediately her favourite—“Distinguished and certainly good-looking,” Miss Taylor mused, “not merely pretty; pale really, not sallow, and what lovely silky hair, not like her sister’s. I’m sure she came down early to make me feel more at home. Mr.

Smith must have asked her. She did it to please him. Yes."

Everything, against likelihood, had gone so well with Miss Taylor till now, that she expected dinner, too, to be a success. She doubted not that there existed between Cyril and Louise, those two young people already so dear to her, a love, not yet perhaps quite conscious, whose blossoming she might watch, and, even, tend.

Smith, however, had lost his talkativeness, and the conversation was kept up almost entirely by Louise, who said how anxious she was to read Miss Taylor's books, and showed herself remarkably well acquainted with English literature. Her knowledge was, perhaps, too much of a text-book kind; yet it was just matter for wonder to Miss Taylor that a young foreign girl should be familiar, not only with the great names, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens, Hardy, but also with such little-read, though meritorious, writers as Tobias Smollett, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and the Reverend George Crabbe.

Miss Taylor expressed her admiration to Madame Tecklenborg.

"Ah, Louise is so clever," her mother remarked, complacently, in broken English. "What you even speak of, she knows."

"Mechanical subjects, too," Hilda interjected, with a malicious smile. Her mother frowned at her; Smith and Louise tried to look unconcerned.

The talk dwindled. Smith seemed ill at ease, and in his curt replies to friendly remarks from Louise almost sulky. Miss Taylor became morbidly conscious of her hands, of her knife and fork, of the process of mastication, and above all of Hilda, bored and hostile, sending occasional smiles of self-pity to the Waldens' table. Beyond the long breakfast table, at the far end of the room

by the door, "W.J." sat alone. A bottle of whisky, to which he referred from time to time, suggested that he was once again arranging a gap between two periods of total abstinence. Twice Miss Taylor found his eyes fixed on her, and throughout the dinner she was uncomfortably conscious that he had both tables under observation.

Smith, meanwhile, was ignobly preoccupied by the impression made on the Waldens and Bull by Miss Taylor. Fleet, he noted with relief, was absent; staying overnight in Munich, he remembered.

A whispering just after they had sat down, Mrs. Walden's lifted eyebrows, the Major's sneer, Bull's puffy, sardonic gaze, a high-pitched laugh from Mrs. Walden, commiserating glances between Mrs. Walden and Hilda, and "Well! Well! Well!" loudly from Bull, a sigh of robust resignation to an increasingly grotesque environment—none of these indications was lost upon Smith.

"Vulgar cads!" he growled, yet the consciousness of their vulgarity was not strong enough to lift him into the comfortable region of dispassionate disdain. He was nineteen, and felt that he was involved in the ridicule directed against Miss Taylor; and it is a serious thing to be ridiculed at nineteen, or at twenty-nine, or thirty-nine, or ninety.

Loathing of Mrs. Walden submerged him. He imagined scenes exquisitely hurtful to her vanity; he placed her in situations where no woman's wit could avail her, where the brassiest insolence must falter, fail, dissolve.

The subject of these day-dreams belonged to a type which, having no especial reason to be pleased with itself, nourishes its self-esteem by despising others. Her person, actually, was not repellent: she was a wiry brunette,

with a loud voice and weather-beaten complexion: and her address was considerable. Schloss Bardenstein affected her nerves painfully, but she meant to endure it till the middle of September. Her and her husband's way of life in London required money, and here she could save; and even in Schloss Bardenstein there was some scope for her skill in intrigue and divison. The isolation of "W.J." would doubtless have occurred without any manœuvring on her part. But the further sub-division into two groups, the relegating of her young compatriot, Smith, to the German group, the attachment of Hilda Tecklenborg to herself, and the intensifying of that attachment by the pathos of meal-time separation, for Hilda could not have left her family unless urgently solicited, and no such solicitation was made—all this was in the main Mrs. Walden's work. Particularly to her credit was the enslavement of Hilda. Hilda hungered for a love affair, but Smith disliked her, and Bull found women of his own class more bother than they were worth, and Fleet was elderly and remote. Major Walden remained: glances were exchanged between the major and Hilda, and an interesting situation was ready to be developed when Mrs. Walden, who had observed the glances, intervened.

Hilda was flattered by the overtures of the smart Englishwoman, whom she had previously disliked only because she felt herself too young and inexperienced to be regarded with anything but indifference by the older woman. Gratified vanity flowered into adoration. Major Walden receded into the background, and Mrs. Walden's domestic felicity remained unimpaired.

Mrs. Walden had a private sorrow. She was childless and must remain so. Her husband, she told Hilda, could not face the risk of losing her.

Major Walden almost deserved not to lose his wife.

His thin lips and vague blue eyes expressed conceit and a stupid shrewdness. If any particular vice is denoted by large and projecting ears, Major Walden was entitled to the enjoyment of it.

Dinner was over, and the Tecklenborgs were about to rise, when Bull came bustling over to inquire if Miss Taylor, would make a fourth at bridge. Miss Taylor, flustered and apologetic, confessed that she did not play.

Bull blew hard, fixed a recriminating eye on Smith, and bustled back to Mrs. Walden, who wore the tired smile of a person waiting for a foregone conclusion to accomplish itself.

Miss Taylor went up to her room directly after dinner. It was a tiny room (Class A), but it looked southwards over the lake and towards the Karwendel mountains. She finished her unpacking, and ranged her books on a little table against the wall. The sight and touch of them cheered her—Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, the Letters of Mademoiselle Despard, the Oxford Book of English Verse, the Oxford Book of German Verse, and half a dozen others. Ah, what friends they were to her, would always be!

Miss Taylor drew a chair to the window and gazed up at the night sky, watching its blue dissolving into the light cast up from behind a distant mountain by the still hidden moon.

At fifty her sensitiveness to beauty was keener than ever. The force of her emotions had not been worn away in the vicissitudes of passion, and the long pain of blotting out all hope of the satisfaction of her own desires had faded, leaving no other traces than a nervousness among strangers and a shrinking from the cruel and ugly side of life. She found her happiness and the satisfaction of her egotism in sympathizing with those who were willing to

be sympathized with, and in contemplating and reproducing in words whatever her fancy could invest with a gentle and soothing beauty. She had freed herself from the unrest of youth, and still retained its illusions.

Her thoughts turned to "W.J." The mistrustful, frightened look, as she and Smith passed him, had moved her profoundly. What was the secret of this unhappy man? She saw again the huge forehead, the large angry eyes, the loose trembling lips. She thought of his boasting under the influence of drink . . . this book of his, a life's labour . . . a masterpiece . . . and he, friendless and despised.

Her eyes filled with tears. The Karwendel range, shimmering faintly, unsubstantial . . . genius insulted and ignored . . . the lake and the still trees . . . herself here! . . . how sad, how exquisite, how fascinating life was!

After dinner, Walden and Bull wandered into the smoking-room, drank cocktails, watched "W.J." sipping whisky in a corner, cursed the Schloss, and invented fresh insults for the letter to Crumpet.

"The fellow," muttered Walden, "can't even send out someone able to make up a fourth at bridge. I don't blame a person for not being a beauty . . ."

"I should bloody well think you didn't," Bull guffawed.

"That's damned offensive, Bull . . ."

The door opened and Mrs. Walden, putting her head in, asked with a constrained smile if she was going to be left to die of boredom.

Bull followed the Waldens to the salon, but, as he entered it, a misty sense of estrangement from Walden propelled him across the room towards Smith, who was

sitting in a corner with a book. Bull's mood demanded a companion, and in his more exalted moments he was drawn to Smith, a wise young man who read deeply and pondered the mystery of things. Ordinarily, he suspected Smith of intellectual pride, and delighted to abash him with broad raillery.

"Got a good book, Smith?" he asked, seating himself and laying a hand on Smith's knee.

"'Heine,'" said Smith, awkwardly. He could never feel at ease with Bull, though there was a gross humanity in the man which appealed to him.

Bull took the volume from Smith, gazed at it long and shrewdly, and handed it back.

"Poetry?" he queried. "No use for poetry. I'll tell you a book I like—Kenilworth. Grande!" (There are subtleties which the French tongue alone can express, and Bull, whose historical periods were mixed, saw in confused vision Versailles and Kenilworth, ruffling Elizabethan gallants and proud beauties with powdered hair.)

"Grande?" queried Smith.

"Grande! Grande!"

"Oh, 'grand'!"

Bull bowed and made a sweeping circular motion with his hands . . . "Courts . . . homage," he explained, "festal magnificence."

"Fancy you liking Kenilworth!" exclaimed Smith.

"What the hell d'you mean? 'Fancy me liking Kenilworth'!"

"Sh—sh—sh," from Mrs. Walden.

Hilda, at Mrs. Walden's request, had gone to the piano. She played really well. The yearnings of her maiden spirit, questionably expressed in ordinary life, expressed themselves in unalloyed beauty at the piano.

Bull's eyes reddened, he groaned and clenched his fists.

"My God, Smith, she plays wonderfully," he growled. "By God, she does! I want to smash things, I want to burn down houses and tear up trees." His right hand closed over the clenched fist of his left and squeezed it with a force that spread his mouth in a grin. His pose and expression were such as Jordaens, but not Fra Angelico, would have approved for a Saint Anthony in the most poignant moment of his temptation.

Major Walden, who was turning over the music for Hilda, seemed to Mrs. Walden to be inspecting the contour of Hilda's neck and shoulders rather too closely.

"Thank you so much, Hilda," she said. "You mustn't tire yourself. Fred, sing."

The major, collecting his faculties, sat down and began to reel off his repertory of music-hall songs.

Presently the door opened, and "W.J." entered, uncertainly. At a frown from Mrs. Walden he closed the door and stood gazing at the major, who was playing the opening air of a song.

"Ah!" sighed "W.J."

The major began to sing:

"Dolly went paddlin',
Dolly and a pal.
I caught a sight o' Dolly's knee.
Oh, what a lovely gal!

"The sun was shinin',
And birds on every tree.
It's queer how I remember
That sight o' Dolly's knee."

"Oh, great, great!" cried "W.J." For a moment the major, his face illumined by the lights at the piano, a certain gusto in his voice, and in the swaying of his head

and body, seemed to “W.J.’s” inflamed vision invested with a grotesque beauty: and the song itself touched a nerve in “W.J.’s” soul to a pang of ecstasy.

“Oh, great!” he cried again.

The major stopped playing and gazed blankly at “W. J.”, who crooned:

“The sun was shinin’,
And birds on every tree—
It’s queer how I remember
That sight o’ Dolly’s knee.”

Uneasy and amazed, the room stared at “W.J.” Their faces vexed him.

“Good God!” he cried. “Can’t you see it? Can’t you feel it?

‘It’s queer how I remember
That sight o’ Dolly’s knee.’

All the longing of life there, light of the sun and singing birds, and the glimpse of unattainable beauty, and the long regret of memory. Miserable creatures, can’t you see it? Don’t you know that the half’s greater than the whole, a snow-peak seen beyond a pine-wood clearing lovelier than all the ranges of the world? Why, why, why? You fools, because the half suggests infinity, the whole obscures it, the poor, limited, earthly whole.

‘It’s queer how I remember
That sight o’ Dolly’s knee.’

Oh, God, God, God!”

“You’d better get out of here,” said the major, advancing on “W.J.”

"But why . . .? What have it . . .?"

"Bull, take his other arm."

"A pretty exhibition," Bull boomed. "Insulting ladies!"

"Please!" exclaimed Louise, rising. "Mr. Gleg meant no disrespect. Mamma, let us go."

"No, mademoiselle," Bull replied, majestically. "The man is d—drunk. Pray leave him to Major Walden and myself. There is no necessity for you to move." He turned to "W.J." "Out with you, sir! Out with you, I say! 'Fools, miserable creatures'! Pretty language! I say, out with you!"

"Damn it, Bull," cried Smith. "Don't talk like that to an old man!"

"Who the devil asked you to interfere, you young puppy?" snarled the major, releasing his grip on "W.J." and turning on Smith.

"I may be young, and I may be a puppy, but I'm not a c—cad," stammered Smith.

"What you want's a damned good hiding!"

"Give it me, then!"

"Fred!" exclaimed Mrs. Walden, sharply. "Don't be ridiculous. Quarrelling with babies!"

Just indignation and the desire to avenge innumerable slights to his vanity seethed within Smith.

"Cads and humbugs!" he cried.

Victor Bull and Walden, deaf to his wife's protests, began to converge on Smith, when "W.J.", who had not stirred since the major released his grip, stepped forward and took Smith by the arm.

"Come along, Smith," he said quietly.

Smith, his protest lodged, was glad of a chance to retreat with dignity. Slowly, and regarding the enemy with just so much disdain as not to provoke them to the frenzies of action, he accompanied "W.J." from the salon,

IV

“W.J.”, followed by Smith, immediately left the house. Plunging down a narrow track the two of them came out on a level path which skirted the shore of the lake for over a mile. The night was warm and full of a faint light.

“To forgive a beaten foe,” said “W.J.”, “that is easy and human. But when your enemies are blatant and triumphing, and it’s you who are beaten and humiliated, and their evil, shining faces frighten and nauseate you, and your soul faints, and your body is racked with pain, then to get outside yourself and pity the poor wretches—that is superhuman.”

“Oh! the vile beasts!”

“But I kept calm, Smith, at least I kept calm!”

Smith muttered a sulky assent to “W.J.’s” boast. He was already regretting an explosion which had outlawed him from respectable society and associated him with this truculent eccentric.

They walked on in silence, broken at last by “W.J.”, who spoke in an embarrassed tone.

“You showed pluck and generosity, Smith. You surprised me. I’ve watched you. I knew you were intelligent and sensitive, but I didn’t expect . . .”

Smith blushed with pleasure. “They behaved like cads, sir,” he mumbled. “They don’t understand you.”

“W.J.” was silent, reflecting. “I have the same effect on everyone,” he remarked at last. “Other men can drink too much, can get excited and noisy without forfeiting sympathy, and provoking loathing.”

“Oh, not loathing, sir,” protested Smith.

“I say ‘loathing.’ Do you know, Smith, I haven’t walked with anyone as I’m walking now with you, in

sympathy, talking freely, for twenty years or more. Genius—oh, yes, I have that. But there's something wrong with me, a poison that taints me through and through."

Smith made a husky, deprecating sound.

"Oh, Smith, the lake, the mountains! That beauty and," beating his breast, "this hell!"

Embarrassment and curiosity contended together in Smith. He was half repelled, half touched by "W.J.'s" sudden friendliness and cries for self-pity. But this was a real experience; he must see it through. Not caring to put himself forward nakedly as the confidant of a soul in distress he made a circuitous approach.

"What is this book, sir, of yours—'The Wandering Jew'? I'm fond of reading, and I should like very much . . . it would be very interesting . . . if you would care to . . . it might be a relief . . . not that I'm capable of understanding, but . . ."

"A poison in me?" "W.J." soliloquized, disregarding Smith's experiments in tact. "But why throw all the blame on myself? If I came to terms with life, like Shakespeare buying gentility and a nice property in his native town, or like Goethe, courtier and laureate of the daily toil, they wouldn't hate me. They've made their peace with life, caved in, grovelled, and they loathe the man who won't grovel, won't feign contentment. Why, even Schopenhauer sheltered himself from rage behind his work, pretended that the philosopher is no longer the slave of desire and slaked his egotism in the savage analysis of the egotism of others. Envy disguised as contempt. But I'll have none of these lies. How tall are you?"

"What? Me? Oh, five eleven and a half."

"You don't look it. I should have said five ten. However, five foot ten or six foot, you're tall enough. Look

at me! Barely five foot four ("Barely five foot two," thought Smith). From fifteen to twenty-three or so I suffered hideously, looking at myself in every shop window and trying, by an erect carriage and fierce eye, to supply my lack of inches. In society I was reserved and morose, like Keats. Keats was five foot. Did you know that? No, of course you didn't. The important things are never mentioned. Fine tall men filled me with anguish. I worshipped and hated tall women. In a word, I sounded envy to the bottom, and, taught by my own feelings, discerned its universal operation. In me it raged more wildly, perhaps, than in most, but I found it everywhere.

"You ask about my book. It's a vast uncoördinated miscellany. I have anatomized envy, vanity, lust, through hundreds of pages, and shown their relation to what is called history. Wars, revolutions! Cure man of envy and desire, and the reign of universal peace will begin."

"But," asked Smith, interrupting a tirade against political panaceas, "why, sir, do you call your book 'The Wandering Jew'?"

"Why, indeed?" snarled "W.J." "You were there the other day when Fleet taunted me with 'Who's the lucky publisher?' I was unmanned, I disgraced myself. But, Smith, I've worked on this book for over thirty years, written and rewritten it, given it every form, epic, dramatic, narrative, essay; and all that's left me is a vast rubble-heap, with here and there a fragment, perfectly conceived and executed, embodying some thought or emotion. Analysis does not satisfy me. I wish to present the whole of life in one dramatic whole, a feat never attempted before. The material is there, but I cannot fuse it.

"I grow old. Men unborn when I was already a man are famous, and I am obscure still, and the butt of en-

vious knaves. Fleet feels the genius in me, and like all the merely clever loathes me. At nineteen or twenty, your age, such men are on the side of genius, still hoping they possess it. At thirty they hate all greatness. I know those men. They bow, sick at heart, before acknowledged genius, but against genius without proofs let loose their spite, feigning incredulity and disappointment. 'Why doesn't he produce?' I know their cry—only too willing to acknowledge a man's genius if only, if only, he will produce. To hell with them, the rancorous hypocrites!

"But I grow old, and my heart fails me often, and I ask myself if I am one of those who cannot bring their genius to birth. Hundreds such have lived and died in unrecorded agony. In every age, says Goethe, there are men who while achieving nothing give an impression of greater genius than the acknowledged masters of the day. Am I such a man? Shakespeare, too, writes :

'So, oft it chances in particular men,
That, for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As, in their birth, (wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,)
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason . . .'

You know the lines. Of course, in the third and fourth lines Shakespeare is thinking of his own low birth, which plagued him all his life. Shakespeare, too . . ."

"Yes, sir, but what about 'The Wandering Jew'?" asked Smith, dazed but persevering.

"Yes, I must limit myself, curb this passionate confusion. You see how I talk. I cannot constrain myself. But I will, I will!"

He swallowed several times and resumed more calmly.

"I'm fifty-six, Smith. Surely the worst rages must be over. Lusts and envy are weakening. The time for the final rewriting is at hand. I begin to see my way. Everything has gone wrong with me in life. I've known neither love nor friendship nor power, and I have longed and still long for all three. Oh, their disillusionments! I divine those clearly enough, but I won't turn my eyes from life and repose in a vision of perfect felicity beyond this torturing world. Why was I given these desires and denied their fulfilment? I rebel against this iniquity, I say I rebel!" His voice rose to a scream.

"And to embody this thirst for life, Smith, and this rage against it, I choose this figure, 'The Wandering Jew.' Why was he, not Judas or Pontius Pilate or Herod or Caiaphas, singled out for the punishment of unending life on earth? I see him as the antitype of Christ; and it is as this I drew him once in a half-finished play, with three characters: Christ, who has transcended and subjugated life; Mary Magdalene, the symbol of life; the Jew, the slave of life, abject before the woman. But the play turned to sentimentality, and I tore it up. Maudlin sensualists enough have bewaped Mary Magdalene. I'll not add myself to the number.

"I shall not touch her again, but Christ I must draw, though words, in reference to him, have almost lost their meaning. Everything has been said about him, and for the most part said badly, and said a million times. Still, draw him I must.

"If I were a painter, I should give three portraits. In the first portrait he is coming from the wilderness towards a village. His eyes see nothing in the external world, men nor women, beauty nor barrenness. The struggle is over, he has put away the dream of earthly dominion and the dream of earthly pleasures and in his shining eyes

you see reflected the serenity of the Heaven to which he will lead men from the dark world.

"In the second portrait he sits alone on the slope of a hill above the unheeding villages of Galilee. The light has faded from his eyes, and his face is set with anger and resolution.

"In the third portrait he is on the cross. The light of Heaven is obscured in his eyes, but the love which sent him out into the world conquers the pain and the darkness. In his own defeat he understands and forgives the defeat of others, and in the moment when he rises highest above humanity, he is most at one with it."

"W.J." paused and looked at Smith. Smith was bewildered by the alternations of arrogance, wounded vanity, and simple, deeply felt emotion. His mood a few minutes earlier had been hostile, and he had meditated an ironic interruption, but faced by the childlike appeal of "W.J.'s" look he now murmured admiration and understanding.

"I'm glad you see it, however dimly," said "W.J."

Smith started. "Gratitude!" he thought, but said nothing.

"You understand, of course," "W.J." resumed, "that my treatment throughout is imaginative. I shall write neither history nor theology. I shall write a poem. No erudition, no local colour. I know neither Hebrew nor Palestine. But I know myself, and the Wandering Jew, restless, embittered, longing, is myself. Is there a connection between my endless beginnings again and the endless wanderings of the legendary Jew, a fatal likeness between the subject and the writer? Well, be that as it may! These two figures, Christ and the Jew—that is my task: to oppose them to each other; a theme requiring the highest imagination, tempered by many years of pain."

For a long time he did not speak. At last, in a remote meditative tone, he resumed:

“I must trace unrest from the first years of life. A field or a wood, in a child’s imagination, a blue hill beyond the bounds of its little walk, a hollow tree hiding in its recesses an entrance into another world, are all promises of a heaven near by which the chance of a moment may reveal. The common things, too, of the nursery and the street, a coal-scuttle, perhaps, or a pillar-box, become at times obscurely significant, as though inarticulate with the mystery. Even their games, which children are supposed to enjoy so whole-heartedly, are never quite satisfying: beyond them lies still the thing which is always sought and never found. I remember once, as I walked by a wooden fence behind which workmen were laying the foundations of a public building, a small boy crossed over from the opposite pavement and peeped through a chink, then turned wistfully away. The pain of these ever recurring disappointments grows slowly in a child’s heart, till it vents itself in an outburst of agony, some trivial check or failure leaving behind a sense of irretrievable loss which lingers through the years, becoming at last an anticipatory symbol of life itself.

“A child’s nightmares, the familiar face suddenly twisted with laughing madness, a horror without shape or sound crouching to leap out, the roar of waves in black night sweeping from all sides to overwhelm the dreamer, are all confused images of desire baffled at every turn.

“In the beauty of a dream hill, a lake, a face, more poignant than any waking beauty, the child sees his desire for a moment, then awakes.”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed Smith, once again charmed. “It’s all true! I remember a very vivid dream . . .”

“I want in some such brief outline as this to express

the imaginative relation of a child to life. Perhaps it would be best to embody these reflections in the Jew's story of his own life. All general reflections are exposed to assault from insensate creatures who 'cannot remember ever to have felt anything of the kind, and greatly doubt if that is at all a usual experience.' Fools!

"Yes, the Jew must tell his story from childhood up." "W.J.'s" head drooped on his chest; he began to mutter to himself, and to clench and unclench his hands. "Yes!" he exclaimed, "my childhood and my youth," and was silent.

"As child," he continued presently, "I shall show him seeking in everything, however beautiful or however common, the solution of his unrest. At last he acquiesces in the uselessness of the search. For a few years, from eight till twelve or so, he busies himself with his own affairs as seriously as a grown man. Then mystery returns, and in confused reveries of sense and spirit, embarrassed and allured by the outward world, he stumbles on first love.

"Oh, boy, that hour, those days!" He clutched Smith's arm, and the moon showed the convulsion of his harsh lined face. "The white dress hiding her sacred loveliness . . . her room, the sanctuary of life not yet possessed, inviolate and waiting . . . all beauty an image of her beauty . . . her voice, her movements, her silence, the sound and motion and tranquillity of life itself."

His hand fell from Smith's arm.

"The fear of death rouses at the vision of life. But her, at any rate, corruption can never touch, and in the assurance of her immortality the hope of his own is confirmed.

"Why did I outlive that time? How have I struggled

through the foul marsh of life who once stood on that mountain?

"But the long story of lust and hatred and envy must be told. I want to show a man whom some malign and intractable element in his nature debars even from the imperfect satisfactions of life, and who, because he is so debarred, thirsts the more savagely for happiness.

"In obscure and contemptible employments he looks at power and pleasure from a distance. A girl dancing, a man riding, lovers pressed against one another as they walk, the pomp of processions, friends laughing at table, every manifestation of life and energy menaces and insults his quivering nerves.

"Then one day he sees Christ, hears him preaching to a crowd, and feels at once the tranquillizing power of a man not involved in life, a voice speaking from another world not subject to dominion with its laws and armies, its ceremonies and palaces, its masters, its pleasures and its slaves. In the crowd he sees men like himself, the refuse of the earth, gaping at new perspectives—'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'

"He is fascinated and repelled. Often he yearns to withdraw his soiled and thwarted desires from the world, and, filled with an undefined but passionate hope, give them into the keeping of Christ.

"But his vanity is affronted by the outcasts who clutch like himself at this rope to drag them from the waters of humiliation. Christ, he thinks, appeals only to the failures, and, in his campaign against life, regards the respected and successful man as his enemy, and the publican and harlot, those whom life despises, as his allies. The one lost sheep is more prized than the ninety-nine who do not feel the need of Christ.

"Power and glory—the Jew sickens for them with that thirst which presently corrupted Judas and a few years later created in the New Jerusalem of Revelation a replica, more gorgeous than the original, of Imperial Rome.

"A purer feeling than vanity is unsatisfied. His sense of the infinite suggestion, beyond analysis, in everything, in a casual gesture or attitude, light falling on a wall, a sudden sound or scent, branches swaying, is thwarted when the lilies of the field, a man sowing, a bowed woman with loosened hair are constrained to enforce a defined truth. He contrasts the inspiration of the poet, varying and receptive, with this fixed inspiration, owing nothing to the movement of life. One day he is present when the wit of a woman surprises Christ—'Even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' For a moment Christ looks round him in a world where the differences of human beings, some dull, some witty, are felt. The moment passes, and Christ withdraws again into a soul nourished from a remote and unknown source.

"Another day he listens to the terrible anger of the man, whom love had sent into the world, against the blind villagers of Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida. Yet each man has but his own eyes. Who made the blind blind?

"No, he cannot see with Christ's eyes, nor follow him into the unknown. Though life tortures him, he will not turn from its promise of happiness, forever unfulfilled; sweeter and nearer to him than any unimaginable heaven are those rare moments when rage is stilled, and he looks at life far off, enchanting as a village among meadows, seen from a high hill.

"On the day when Christ climbs slowly up to Calvary, the Jew stands by the roadside. The faces of the disci-

ples, seen here and there in the surging mob, are white with agony. Life, the monster which breathes confusedly through earth's millions, has mastered their champion. Who can save them now?

"The Jew weeps bitterly as he looks into the eyes of Christ, no longer angry or remote, but filled with a sublime compassion, for all men as for himself. In the moment of life's victory, the Jew kneels before Christ for the first time. But the figure recedes in the distance, the ecstasy of abasement and renunciation fades, he turns and goes down into Jerusalem."

"Oh, great!" cried Smith, but "W.J." said nothing. His eyes were wide and fixed, and he was silent for a long time.

v

"W.J.", when he began to speak again, passed by obscure transitions to an analysis of war. "Three years ago," he said, "everyone affirmed that there could never be another war. Mankind had suffered too much. Mankind had learnt its lesson. But they said just the same in 1918, and they will say just the same in another fifty years when the next great war is over. Life is not adapted to the satisfaction of desire, and what are wars but the explosions of unsatisfied desire?"

"Yes," said Smith, a little doubtfully.

"History, Smith, is simply a record of the convulsions caused by the grown man's efforts to find in company with others what he has failed to find alone, as child and boy and youth."

He murmured this aphorism over to himself, very happy at having outlined in so lucid a form a thought which had long haunted him. As Smith appeared to have not quite grasped it, he repeated it again, twice, with slow

emphasis . . . "History, my dear Smith, is simply the record . . ." and "I say, Smith, that history is no more than the record . . ."

At the third repetition Smith made a mistake. "Yes," he said, "that sounds pretty obvious."

"Obvious!" snorted "W.J." "Obvious!" He was terribly put out. He had felt on the verge of seeing how to work these general considerations on war into the framework of the Jew's story. Now this young fool had upset him. It was time to go to bed.

They climbed in silence up to the Schloss, and parted coldly. A great evening suddenly gone flat.

The next morning, Smith awoke with a feeling of apprehension which presently defined itself as uneasiness about the Waldens and Bull.

Walden and the Tecklenborgs were at breakfast when Smith came down. Smith looked at Walden nervously, and Walden ignored him.

The easy, charming life at Schloss Bardenstein, which he was enjoying so much, suddenly became overcast. He began to wonder if he had not made an ass of himself the previous evening. After all, "W.J." had been drunk and offensive. Women had been present. "W.J." had insulted everyone: he was an intractable, overbearing crank. Oh, clever enough, more than clever—he had said some wonderful things, but, damn it, the usual run of mankind couldn't be expected to see beneath the surface. They had a right to demand ordinary manners even from a genius. And he, Smith, had butted in, and yelled at them, and called them "cads and humbugs."

Ought he to apologize? No, damn it, that would be too much. After all, "W.J." was an old man, and, if it came to that, Bull wasn't any too sober himself. A couple

of infernal bullies, treating an old man like that, in front of women. A genius, too, poor devil! Rather a trying old card, of course, but genius had a right, damn it, to be trying. Who the hell were Walden and Bull? Apologize? He'd see himself damned first.

Smith, preoccupied by this alternation of hot and cold fits, ate little. After breakfast, instead of working in his room as usual, he retired to the salon with a novel.

Louise had noticed his worried look, and presently joined him in the salon. He received her glumly. Here was another complication!

Louise had been engaged, a year and a half previously, to an engineer, and was to have followed him to Brazil, but two months after his arrival in that country he ceased to answer her letters. A year passed, and one day Louise received a newspaper cutting which announced her lover's marriage. The strain of waiting, thus sharply ended, affected her health, and it was not till she came to Schloss Bardenstein that she began to recover hope and vitality. She had told her story to Smith, and Smith was moved and indignant, in the incoherent fashion of youth.

His sympathy, however, had recently been modified by other emotions. On the previous Sunday Madame Tecklenborg had manœuvred him into an intimate talk. She praised Louise in the warmest terms, telling how passionately she had immersed herself in the study of engineering, so as to fit herself to assist her future husband in his profession, and then that scoundrel—but of him Madame Tecklenborg could not trust herself to speak. Ah, how different was Tsireel! (as she called Cyril)—so good, so gentle, so true! She could not say anything—here she smiled and allowed a mild confusion to appear—Louise would be very angry with her, for having said even what she had. She would not for anything that Louise should

know. Indeed, Tsireel must not suppose that her remarks had any particular significance. Ah, poor Louise! It was good to see her looking so happy again.

Smith, though affronted by this view of him as a true and gentle young man, did not blame Louise for her mother's disgusting misconception of his character; nor did he flatter himself that Louise was in love with him. He felt, however, that she might, young though he was, look upon him as likely to prove a good and considerate husband to a girl disillusioned with love. The notion appalled him. He was not that kind of man, and it was horrible that any girl should think of him in that kind of way. He began, unobtrusively, to see as little of her as was consistent with politeness and their former friendly relations.

And now here he was, cornered by her! The salon was empty, and no one ever came into it during the morning.

Louise seated herself beside him on the sofa.

"You are worried, Cyril," she said, gently. "Is it because of last night? You were very brave. It was right that someone should speak in defence of poor Mr. Gleg."

"I'm so glad you think so . . . you're a jolly good sort, Louise." After all, what fine eyes she had! There was something so cool and steady and reassuring and encouraging about her.

"You *are* a good sort," he blurted, and seized her hand. He had one friend, anyway, in this confounded hole.

He was squeezing her hand more fiercely than he realized.

"Oh, Cyril!" she cried.

"Have I hurt you, Louise?"

"No, no, oh, no!"

"I have! I have! Darling!"

"Cyril!"

"Darling!"

He flung his arms round her, roughly and clumsily, and the unhappiness of Louise, a long and wearing pain, and the unhappiness of Smith, a discomfort of a few hours, sought euthanasia in a kiss.

A sound between a grunt and a snarl shook them out of their embrace. Jerking round, they saw "W.J." regarding them balefully from the doorway.

"S—sorry," gasped Smith.

A sneer contorted "W.J.'s" face. He bowed and retreated.

Louise rose, and, taking Smith's hand in both hers, looked at him long and searchingly.

"Awkward about 'W.J.'," he muttered, feeling the need to say something. His brief frenzy had subsided, her gaze embarrassed him, and he wondered uneasily what on earth would come of this outburst.

"I think we had better not tell mother yet," Louise said, at last, and released his hand. She paused, but Smith, paralysed by the implication of this remark, was beyond speech.

"Well, Cyril, I must leave you now."

"Good-bye Louise."

He tried to add a loving phrase, but his tongue refused its office. Not to pick up his novel until she had left the room was the only sign of passion to which disordered faculties were at the moment equal.

"W.J." meanwhile was walking off his chagrin. The comfort of Smith's society had not been fully realized by him on the previous evening. "Quite an intelligent young fellow, but too fond of the sound of his own voice," was his verdict, as he undressed for bed. But the absence of Smith revealed the advantage of his presence, as a man

often becomes conscious of a sound only in the moment when it dies away.

As soon as he had breakfasted he set out in search of Smith. And he had found him! Oh, yes, he had found him all right!

That his only disciple should be enjoying himself in the embraces of a girl, while his master wandered forlorn and unloved, impressed him like an act of treachery or a deliberate expression of contempt.

Exercise and reflection calmed "W.J." "I am balanced and reasonable at bottom," he mused, "but on the surface hasty, without judgment, irritable. . . ."

In the course of his life "W.J." had been a school-master, tutor, lecturer, private secretary, and finally, during the war, a hack-writer in the Ministry of Information. Everywhere he had illustrated the truth of the latter part of the verdict he had just passed on himself, alienating his colleagues and superiors by irritability and truculence. In his latest job, being commissioned to write a eulogy of the Allied cause from the standpoint of a sensitive, cultured and, naturally, disinterested Laplander (Lapland did not abandon its neutrality till the last year of the war), he had unpent himself in a sketch, "England at War," to such effect that his immediate resignation was demanded. Having sunk his savings in an annuity of £200, he was now trying to put by enough money to defray the publishing expenses of "The Wandering Jew," when completed.

While "W.J." was recovering his poise, Smith was plunging more and more deeply into gloom and apprehension. The need for moral support against the Waldens and Bull had betrayed him into making a fool of himself with Louise, and Heaven alone knew what would come of that! Engaged! At nineteen! Could such things be?

He tried to warm his imagination with pictures of Louise as a bride, and a false glow cheered him for a space. But no! But no! He could not approximate her to the ideal he dreamed of, white-skinned, supple, warm dark hair (*not* silky), swift, yielding, not calm, measured. Why, Marie was a thousand times nearer the love of his dreams, and even Marie . . . but what a darling she was! He would, he must, make an opportunity to see her alone. . . . Damn everyone else! The Waldens, Louise, what did they matter, if only . . .

Too restless to read, he got up and strode out into the hall. The post had just arrived, and Marie was assuring Walden and Bull in simple German that no tobacco had arrived for either of them.

"But it's two days overdue!" they expostulated in chorus.

"Oh, Mr. Smith!" she cried. "Please tell these gentlemen there is no parcel, but no parcel! arrived."

How charming she looked! Light brown hair, eyebrows much darker than her hair, large grey eyes, shining with impatience, a foot tapping the ground.

"Fräulein Schreiner says no parcel has arrived by this post," Smith explained, adding stiffly, after a pause—"I've got a tin upstairs, the same kind as you smoke, if you'd care to . . ."

"I prefer to wait," said the major.

"Oh, very well!" Smith walked off and out of the house. He had not gone above a hundred yards, when he heard Bull calling after him . . . the sound of a man running . . . no doubt, Bull . . . well, let him run.

"Smith!" Bull, puffing loudly, was now too close to be ignored.

"Yes?" said Smith, pausing.

Bull, coming up with him, took his arm and began to

march him along. Bull's manner, at once confidential and assured, accorded well with his character of a plenipotentiary sent by Walden to treat with Smith.

"Look here, Smith," he began, as soon as he had recovered his breath. "Walden's a regular, been in the Army twenty years. He's a married man, too. You were damned offensive last night. That doesn't worry me, but Walden's not accustomed to back-chat from lads of your tender years. It's up to you to put things right. You needn't run to a formal apology."

"I should damn well think I needn't! What about Major Walden starting off the apologies with one to Mr. Gleg?"

"If you're going to take that line, Smith, it'll be the worse for you. You won't get off so easily next time. Here's Walden without any tobacco. You've got your chance, and you carry on with your damned sauce. By God, Smith, you're asking for trouble, you are, by God!"

"Well, I offered him my tobacco, didn't I?"

"Offer it again, Smith!" Bull squeezed Smith's arm. "Offer it again! Take a straight tip!"

Bull wheeled Smith around, and began to walk him back towards the Schloss.

"How do I know he won't turn me down again?" Smith protested.

Bull gave a reassuring wink. "You'll find him in the smoking-room," he said.

"He'll have to drop his damned airs, if he wants my tobacco," Smith muttered, as he went upstairs; ignoring a feeling of relief at this solution of an awkward situation.

The major was reclining in an easy-chair when Smith entered the smoking-room. Bull was sitting on a table,

swinging his legs. Smith placed his tobacco tin on the table.

"Now look here, Smith," said the major. "You're very young. If you were five or six years older I should be compelled to take a very different line. As it is, I'm not going to say anything about last night. I appreciate this offer of yours, and I'm perfectly willing to cry quits."

Bull plunged his hand into the tin and began to transfer a large portion of its contents to his pouch.

"But take a tip from a much older man than yourself, Smith. Don't get mixed up with that fellow Gleg. He's a bad hat." The major reached over and possessed himself of the tin. "He's 'bunda.'¹ Of course, you're literary, aren't you? That's perfectly all right. But there are certain things that stamp a man. A fellow can drink as much as he likes in the Army, but he's got to carry it like a gentleman. And you'll find it's more or less the same everywhere. This fellow Gleg appeals to you because he writes or says he does. Well and good. But there are writers and writers. The man's a damned pro-Jap—you heard him insulting our Army the other evening. He's a bad egg, he's bogus. Drop him. Thanks." The major handed the depleted tin back to Smith.

"He's not half as bad as he seems," Smith protested. "He really isn't. He's had rotten luck."

"Yes, yes." The major, filling his pipe, smiled tolerantly. "But take my tip, Smith. Don't get mixed up with him."

"He's got genius. He has!"

"Well, it's your own funeral. I've told you how he strikes me, and I've knocked about a bit. How about a

¹ "Bunda." An East-African term signifying "worthless, dishonest, a ne'er-do-well." Introduced into Army English during the Kenya War—1953-54.

stroll, Bull? This infernal hole plays the devil with my liver."

Linking arms, Walden and Bull strolled off, puffing out great clouds of smoke. As they rounded a sharp bend about a hundred yards down the avenue, they came upon "W.J." He, like them, was in the centre of the road, striding with bent head.

"He'll butt into us," said Walden.

"Let him!" said Bull. "He'll get the worst of it."

"W.J." looked up. Their smiling faces enraged him. He saw that they meant him to give way. The memory of the previous night's outrage went to his head.

"Dogs!" he cried, and raised his stick.

Bull released Walden's arm and stepped back. "Ha!" shouted "W.J.", and pushed his way between them.

Walden gazed after him, too taken aback to speak. "You damned old rip!" he at last ejaculated, but "W.J." was now out of hearing.

VI

Smith came in to lunch looking constrained. Uneasiness about Louise had succeeded to uneasiness about Walden and Bull. Before he was seated he was already talking hurriedly to Miss Taylor. How had she slept? What had she been doing all the morning? What did she think of the place? What was her room like?

Adequate answers were furnished; a lull threatened, and Smith plunged into a paraphrase of "W.J.'s" talk the previous evening.

Hilda presently interposed with a malicious account of the scene in the drawing-room, but Louise defended "W.J." warmly.

"It's a pity he doesn't carry his wine better," said

Smith. “Still, the man has genius.” He began to feel easier about Louise. She understands, he thought, she’s going to ignore the whole incident. A real sportsman!

His spirits rose. “I’ll introduce you to ‘W.J.’ after lunch, Miss Taylor,” he cried.

“Oh, but do you think . . . are you sure . . . hadn’t you better wait a little?”

“No! No! ‘W.J.’s’ perfectly all right, if you know how to handle him.”

Miss Taylor protested a little longer, but when lunch was over she allowed Smith to lead her in search of “W.J.”

“W.J.” was sitting on the bench where Miss Taylor had seen him for the first time, on the previous evening. His face lit up as Smith came into view, but at the sight of Miss Taylor he frowned.

“May I introduce Miss Taylor, Mr. Gleg? Miss Taylor has just arrived. She writes, too. She is very much interested . . . I told her about your book . . . if you would care to . . . she would be very glad. . . .”

Miss Taylor bobbed and murmured. Smith, alarmed by “W.J.’s” glare, turned and retreated towards the Schloss.

The substitution of an elderly spinster for a good-looking young man exasperated the master. It was not this kind of disciple that could soothe his vanity, outraged by the indifference of the world. “Smith prefers that girl to me,” he thought. “This woman, whom nobody else wants, is good enough for me. Is she?” He glared at Miss Taylor.

“So you write, do you?” he barked. “And, pray, what do you write? Love stories?”

“Sometimes.”

“What do you know about it?”

Miss Taylor flushed and turned away.

"Good God!" "W.J." raised his voice and Miss Taylor, to his satisfaction, halted. "Good God, madam, is there no other theme? Look!" he waved his hand to the plains and mountains. "Can't you see them, bending at their desks, the world over, at this moment, as I speak, thousands of fools spilling ink on the same stale theme? And while they scribble, millions, I say millions, now, now, this minute, north there!" he jumped up and stabbed his finger at the north, then whirled round, "south, there! east, there! west, there! millions, I say, sighing, groaning, clutching each other, or restless with expectation, or dulled by satiety. And still the fools scribble."

Miss Taylor flushed yet more deeply, and was silent. An obstinate look came into her eyes.

"Well," snapped "W.J." "What have you to say?"

"I don't believe you feel like that," she said, haltingly. "I don't believe you can look at life in that way. One can't think of human beings in millions. How can the rest of the world dwarf a man and woman when they love each other? The whole world is in their hearts then." Her voice shook, but he had wounded both her pride and her faith too deeply for her to be silent. "You may despise me for thinking and writing about love, but one needn't have been loved to understand it. One need only have loved. There is love everywhere. I see it everywhere. Yesterday, when the snow on those mountains turned to rose-colour, kissed by the setting sun . . . and that lake, look how it takes the sky to its heart!" Her voice broke, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"W.J." was abashed. "Pooh! Don't cry!" he exclaimed, and looked searchingly at her. It amazed him that one so little indebted to life should speak of it so lovingly.

Vexed with himself, he wished to be rid of the feeling and jumped up.

"Come, let's stretch our legs," he said.

They climbed down the rough track to the lake, and skirting its northern end followed a path which wound up to the summit of a hill. It was a warm afternoon: they seated themselves on a dry grassy hummock and looked down the slopes of the hill, waving with meadow-grass, and over the rolling country and at the distant mountains.

"God knows I don't want to be bitter and offensive," "W.J." said at last. "You, Miss Taylor, look at this world and are happy, looking. But merely to look exasperates instead of satisfying me. To be what I look at—that is what I thirst for. Do you understand? You know, when one's young one expects, without analysing the hope, to identify oneself presently with the thing looked at. That train down there, tiny, a toy, moving over the plain as though conscious of a delightful goal, yet in no hurry; or that cow lying in the shadow of the tree, a patch of sunlight on its flank; or those clouds, warm and white and unmoving—if I were a boy again, the longing awakened by these sights would be stilled by the hope of merging myself in them. Of course, this aspiration is ludicrous to the common-sense of later years. A man can't merge himself, with any profit, in a train, a cow, or a cloud.

"That cow is a dull mass of flesh and blood and bone. That train is a contrivance of wood and steel, freighted with melancholy fools. That cloud is a damp mist.

"Yet that cow is also an image of calm encircled by beauty; that train expresses movement without unrest; those clouds are the happiness promised to my soul.

"They are one thing in themselves, another thing in

my imagination. Why?" He jumped to his feet. "I say, why? How can other men live at ease, blind to the mockery of sight and scent and sound? How can they? Well!" he unclenched his hands and sat down again.

"Perhaps, after all," he said, "there is a heaven where each desire infuses itself into the thing desired, so that they are no longer two but one, and there I shall be myself and yet a cloud and yet the curve of a girl's neck and a wave beyond the Hebrides and a hill bright at dawn, the smell of a primrose, the sound of a horn far off. I want no other heaven. I want no undistinguishable bliss."

He got up, paced to and fro several times, then, sitting down, rested his chin on his hands.

"Yes, yes, I understand," cried Miss Taylor, suddenly, "and, you know, it isn't only life that tantalizes one like that. Books, too—it's hard to explain, but while you were talking, so wonderfully, just now, I tried to conjure up *my* heaven, the things *I* wanted to be, to be in your sense, you know, and all kinds of longings have been sweeping over me which I had never clearly realized as longings before, and I would wish to be the seashore where David Copperfield played with Emily, and the trees and crows of Castlewood on a summer evening, and little Harry Esmond walking there, and Ruth's watermill 'by spouts and fountains wild,' and the misty mountain-tops when Romeo kissed Juliet good-bye, and a street in mediaeval Paris, snow glistening on the steep-roof houses, warmth within and outside the creaking lamps and the distant howling of wolves—oh, and a thousand thousand other things, back, back through my life, back to Little Boy Blue and the sheep and the sky of nursery rhymes, so far away, so free from pain!"

She twisted her hands convulsively and, abashed by her outbreak, glanced sideways at “W.J.”

He was pleased with her quick understanding, and with the excitement he had stirred in her, but thought it salutary to mark a distinction between her sensibility and his own.

“Very nice, Miss Taylor, very nice!” He smiled at her, sardonic yet affable. “Very nice, and very literary.”

The deadly epithet found its mark. Miss Taylor shrivelled into herself. “I suppose books do mean too much to me,” she quavered. “I have always been a great reader. I suppose if someone . . . if I had been different . . . you see, no one . . .”

“What a brute I am!” thought “W.J.” “The poor little woman was so eager, and she feels subtly and beautifully. I must gloze it over.”

“Please,” he said aloud, “don’t see a sneer in the word ‘literary.’ It can convey a very high compliment.”

She turned grateful brown eyes towards him, and he smiled reassuringly. They rose and continued their walk, and “W.J.”, his conscience placated, began to talk about himself. Time passed, they had tea in an inn at the southern end of the lake, and then turned homewards, joining the road from Andernach to the Schloss at about half-past five.

Never had “W.J.” had such a listener, nor Miss Taylor heard such talk. She saw his egotism; he could not get outside himself and walk about disinterestedly in the world of common life, but sometimes he could rise above the earth in sudden flights and look down upon it with eyes tranquillized by distance. She cried as he told the story of the Jew, amplified and brought nearer to perfection since its recital to Smith. “W.J.” marked her tears, and his stride lengthened and his heart expanded.

"Let's get off this road," he cried. "It's cooler in the wood, and easy walking."

Smith passed the earlier hours of the afternoon on his bed, smoking, reading, dozing; lazy in mind and body, restless in fancy and desire. He roused himself shortly before five, and went downstairs; and, to avoid Louise, about whom, however, his mind was now fairly easy, ordered tea in the smoking-room.

He was obsessed by the picture of Marie colouring and swaying towards him. Where was she? With her sister and grandmother, no doubt, or helping in the housework. He opened the door so as to command the passage. Steps in the hall . . . he jumped up. Mrs. Walden!

"Have you seen Major Walden?"

"No. He hasn't been here. Perhaps . . ."

"Thank you."

Smith sank back. What an infernally offensive woman! Didn't she realize that he was practically keeping her husband in tobacco? As he glowered over her lack of breeding, Marie came through the hall and glanced quickly at him as she passed. There was a question in her look.

When he reached the entrance of the Schloss, he saw her walking slowly down the avenue. She was hatless; not going to Andernach, therefore, and she almost certainly knew that he was having tea in the smoking-room. His heart beat thickly. He glanced about—no one in sight. Bracing his shoulders, he strode down the avenue.

As he drew near she turned her head, and looked at him, but without a smile.

"Good afternoon, Fräulein Schreiner."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Smith."

They walked side by side in silence. A track diverged from the road into a pine wood.

"This way!" he muttered, and clutched her hand.

It was cooler in the wood. The sunlight quivered on the ground in patches, and on her hair, her cheek, her neck. She gave a little cry and turned into his arms.

They kissed and kissed, she with sudden sobs, he between long breaths, and pressing his hands down her slender inward-curving back.

The sound of steps drew near through the wood. Abruptly Miss Taylor and "W.J." came upon them.

"Oh!" cried Miss Taylor, and shook from head to foot. "Their passion! and oh, how beautiful they were, and the sun through the trees!"

"Good God!" screamed "W.J." "Again! And another girl!"

Smith released Marie, and turning saw "W.J." glaring, and by his side Miss Taylor, crimson with confusion.

"W.J." spun on his heel and plunged through the wood. Reaching the road he waited for Miss Taylor, and as soon as she appeared shouted at her.

"That young blackguard was kissing Louise Tecklenborg this morning. Good subject-matter for your next book. Gr—r—r!"

He paced furiously up the road.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" murmured Miss Taylor. "I'm very sorry to hear that. He really shouldn't. But oh, how sweet they looked!"

Her eyes followed "W.J." "Oh, poor Mr. Gleg!" she cried. "Why is he like that, why? . . . If he had a wife who understood him . . ."

"W.J." went up to his room, rang the bell for hot water, pulled off his boots, and, huddled in a chair, sat glaring at the floor, sick with rancour and loathing. Miss Taylor! He grinned savagely—a proper companion for a

contemptible old outcast. That infernal young coxcomb . . . life clasped in his arms—oh, the lines of her girl body! And the sun playing on them, and the air murmuring round them, and the scent of pines in their nostrils.

A groan twisted itself out of him.

The door opened, and the chambermaid, Martha, robust, ruddy, steeped in a slow but prodigious vitality, entered with the hot water.

"W.J." stared at her and began to breathe quickly.

"Martha!" he gasped.

She turned, in mild surprise, and saw him advancing on her with outstretched shaking hands.

"Na, na!" she said. "Don't be stupid, now!"

"I must! I must!" he cried. He tried to put his arms round her, but she shook him off with a vigorous wrench of her body.

To clasp her, to feel the warm life pulsing through her, to be sheltered from himself, for one moment, in her arms—that was all he desired. It must be, she must, she must grant him this. He tore a handful of notes out of his pocket-book.

"Take them! Take them!" he cried.

"Pfui!" she exclaimed. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you wicked old man!"

"I will not let you go!" He rushed at her, but she was strong and, in her resentment, active. Pushing his hands away she smacked his cheek smartly. He stepped back and she darted from the room.

VII

The heat of the day discharged itself in a thunder-storm during dinner.

Mrs. Walden, looking out of the window, perceived "W.J." pacing up and down.

"What on earth is the man doing?" she exclaimed, addressing Fleet, who had returned from Munich during the afternoon. "It's raining cats and dogs!"

"Perhaps our friend is fond of animals," suggested Fleet. He spoke habitually in a low, mournful tone which contrasted effectively with the satirical tone of his remarks.

"Ha! Good!" cried the major. Bull guffawed. Mrs. Walden gave a sharp laugh.

The Waldens and Bull were sufficiently intimidated by Fleet's brains to treat him with respect. He wrote, they had gathered, for the heavier monthlies—yet did not seem to live in a more rarefied atmosphere than themselves. This was gratifying and as a return they affected a rather exaggerated relish for his wit; while Fleet accommodated his sarcasm to their understanding, and over-emphasized for their benefit the dislike which he felt for "W.J." and his pretensions to genius.

"W.J." came in when dinner was nearly over; wet through and hair disordered, but calmer after his violent exertion than might have been deduced from his appearance.

A bout with a chambermaid! Hardly a matter to take tragically. He had behaved very absurdly and frightened the poor fool. If she complained to the housekeeper a few words would put everything right—"A touch of the sun, Frau Dernberger . . . thunder in the air . . . I regret exceedingly . . . might I suggest a little *douceur* to the girl?"

After dinner "W.J." went straight to his room. The last twenty-four hours had been too full: he felt exhausted. Wet through, too. A hot bath was just the thing . . . hm, hm . . . simply ring the bell and order one. . . . No!

He washed in cold water, undressed, and got into bed.

Meanwhile, the Goddess Rumour was handling the history of the elderly libertine and the virtuous chambermaid with her usual command over publicity, and skill in amplification.

Before dinner Martha, smiling complacently, had put Frau Dernberger in possession of the actual facts which, as they did her credit in every particular, needed, from her standpoint, no elaboration. After dinner Rumour instructed Frau Dernberger to waylay Madame Tecklenborg with a foolish query about the number of blouses sent to the wash on the previous Monday by the Tecklenborg family. The query answered, Frau Dernberger disburdened herself of her news. "A fat lump like Martha, too!" she added, a stroke omitted by Martha, but dramatically right, as deepening the degradation of the villain.

Madame Tecklenborg hastened to the salon, and panted out the tale to a group made up of her two daughters Smith and Miss Taylor. The effect of her version, which differed from Frau Dernberger's in laying emphasis on the victim's distress, was heightened by the reticence due, in the presence of strangers, to the innocence of her daughters. Before the imagination of her listeners there rose up the unequivocal outline of a satyr.

Smith and Miss Taylor, who had a clue to the cause of "W.J.'s" outbreak, avoided each other's eyes and looked embarrassed.

"Such a creature needs a wife to keep him in order," moralized Madame Tecklenborg.

"He lacks character," said Louise. "It seems a common fault in those who read much and have few responsibilities. In such cases it is best to say nothing and choose other friends." She looked calmly at Smith, who felt the

force of her words and blushed. The cold firm sentences filled him with respect for the redoubtable girl who uttered them, quenching at the same time any lingering tenderness.

Hilda made no comment on her mother's story, but her eyes gleamed, and she looked across the salon at the others who were playing bridge. She determined to wait up. It would be worth it.

Play ceased shortly after eleven, and Hilda hurried over to Mrs. Walden, whom she drew aside. She had not overestimated the interest of her news.

“The disgusting creature!” cried Mrs. Walden. “Fred, Mr. Fleet, Victor, do listen! That nasty old thing ‘W.J.’ . . .”

“Infernal blackguard!” exclaimed the major, as Mrs. Walden concluded with “the poor girl has had fit after fit of hysterics. The doctor has been with her the whole evening.”

Bull had blown hard throughout the narrative. “Good God!” he now ejaculated. “Martha!” and “Martha!” . . . puff, puff. . . “Good God!”

His reaction to the outrage clearly differed from that of the others; but they were too much engrossed to bother about Bull's reactions; and he, on his side, did not care to obtrude a purely personal view of the situation.

“Something's got to be done about this,” said Walden. “We've stood Gleg long enough. The fellow's impossible, utterly ‘bunda.’ Drunk and damnably insulting last night, barges people about on the public thoroughfares, damn him, and now this! What are we going to do about it?”

“Perhaps Martha might be induced to make an honest man of him,” suggested Fleet, but the remark fell flat. It was out of place. In the nerve-wearing boredom of Schloss Bardenstein, the tonic of moral indignation was

exquisitely acceptable. The Waldens, Hilda, and Bull, too, were determined to savour each drop of it to the full.

At last, after the incident had been traversed a score of times and every penalty from a prosecution in the courts to an immersion in the lake suggested and examined, they separated, still glowing, for the night. Fleet alone had not caught the infection; but not caring to spoil sport he kept quiet, going up to bed filled with distaste for himself and everyone else.

One of the minor tribulations of Schloss Bardenstein, and the subject of many of the messages conveyed by Smith to Frau Dernberger, was the rat-a-tat-tat with which Martha roused the Schloss inmates each morning. The Waldens and Fleet were especially bitter on this point, and Bull had at first shared their resentment; but of late Martha had accorded him preferential treatment, tweaking his nose gently, or in some other playful fashion wooing to wakefulness; an informal private arrangement which Bull had not communicated to Fleet or the Waldens.

Martha's devil's tattoo, on the following morning, a crude but searching comment on their sympathetic distress of the night before, galled the Waldens to speechless frenzy. Mrs. Walden sat up in bed and opened her mouth, but whatever she said could not but dissipate beyond recovery the emotional atmosphere of the previous evening. She sank back.

Fleet, another victim, finding Walden at breakfast, was less reticent.

"Singular powers of recuperation our Martha possesses," he murmured. "A very formidable Lucrece for a Tarquin of 'W.J.'s' unimpressive physique to trifle with. By the way, has anyone seen 'W.J.'? Is he still extant?"

“I neither know nor care where Gleg is,” snapped Major Walden. “Martha’s recuperative powers, as you call them, don’t alter the fact that the fellow’s a criminal blackguard.”

“Possibly not. But they may have some bearing on the extent of his criminality.”

The rest of the meal passed in silence, and the major left the table in a bad humour. Fleet was devilish witty, no doubt, but there were times when wit was in infernal bad taste.

Bull was not yet down. Mrs. Walden always breakfasted in bed. The major seemed to himself bereft of all support in the vendetta against “W.J.”, inaugurated so enthusiastically the night before.

Hilda, sitting at the other end of the table, noted the effect of Fleet’s levity on the major. Last night’s excitement had been to her taste, and she was no less annoyed than the major with Fleet.

Could she not have a talk with a major? Smoothing back her hair with her lean brown fingers, and wiping her face with a pocket-handkerchief, she stepped across the hall to the smoking-room, opened the door and looked in.

“Oh, Mr. Smith is not here!” she exclaimed.

The major jumped up, and they stood looking at each other for a few moments.

“I thought Mr. Smith was here.” She turned to go. The major felt a dryness in his throat.

“I say . . . er, Hilda!”

“Yes, Major Walden.”

Mrs. Walden called her Hilda, but the major rarely and with difficulty and hitherto only in his wife’s presence.

“Won’t I do as well as Smith, Hilda?” This time he lingered over her name, and smiled ingratiatingly.

She returned his smile, but said nothing.

"What about a cigarette, Hilda?" He held out his case.

"I do not think I ought to stay. Ladies must not come into a smoking-room." She smiled.

"Nonsense, nonsense! Your mother won't smack you, will she? Too old to be smacked!"

His eye held hers. They both coloured.

"If she threatens, I'll offer to smack you for her. Eh, Hilda? I wouldn't hurt. Smack you nice and gently!"

They had moved within reach of each other. He clasped her wrist and patted her back. "Smack you like that, what!"

She tried to disengage her wrist. His grasp tightened and he leaned towards her.

"No! No!" she strained from him, and averted her face. "Please!"

His arms went round her waist, and he buried his face in her hair.

"No! No! Your wife, Major Walden!"

Placing a hand on her cheek, he forced her face round, and pressed his mouth to hers. Her struggles relaxed, ceased. She flung her arms round his neck.

Her ardour withered his. His heart sank at the fury of her response. "Better be careful," he murmured, and backing out of her embrace seated himself on the edge of a table. Her narrowed eyes, the long breaths she drew, her hands hanging limply by her sides, frightened the major.

He lit a cigarette, and laughed nervously.

"Pull yourself together, Hilda! Fleet may come in at any moment!"

She started, and began to smooth her hair and dress.

The major looked at her coldly. She was no beauty, by God! It was the difficulty, he realized, not the girl

that had attracted him. "We'd better forget all about this," he said, curtly. Hilda was silent.

"You're a sportsman, Hilda," he said, softening his voice. "You understand."

"I understand that you despise me."

"Despise you! Good God, my dear girl, have I behaved as if I despised you?"

"Yes!"

The major was desperate. This was not an occasion for half-hearted rhetoric.

"Hilda, it's just because you're so infernally attractive that we've got to drop it. Won't you help me?"

She looked searchingly at him. His genuine alarm furnished forth a convincing enough expression of anguish.

"I understand," she said, and gave him her hand, which he raised gently to his lips. They were silent for a time.

"It's rather funny after Mr. Gleg last night," she said.

"Dash it, Hilda!" expostulated the major, but with a smile. The danger had passed, and in his relief he was willing to prolong the situation a little. Hilda smiled back.

"The comparison is not quite fair, is it?" she said.

"I should say not!"

"A chambermaid, who was not even willing!"

"Yes, by God. I don't pretend to be a saint, but there are some things I draw the line at."

"Oh, you men are all alike. You think no one can resist your beautiful eyes. I am sure if I looked twice at Mr. Gleg he would think I loved him."

"Good God, what an idea! Really, my dear girl!"

"It would be quite amusing, would it not? A punish-

ment for him. He would be so angry when I laughed at him!"

"You mean, make him think you were really bitten by him? But the fellow's so revolting. Besides, you don't know what you might let yourself in for."

"Oh, I can manage him! A few sighs, a little pity for his genius, like Miss Taylor and Cyril Smith. Or impertinence—they like it at that age. Believe me, it would not be difficult. There would be a grand scene. He would fall on his knees, and declare his love. A fine comedy!" Her eyes gleamed and she writhed her body.

"I believe you've devil enough to do it, by God! And it would serve the blighter right—seems to think he's bought the place—gets drunk and rows us all like a bargee one day, and makes violent love to a chambermaid the next. And we sit down under it. The blighter needs touching up. It's a warm scheme. I like it. But where do I come in?"

"Let me think a minute." Hilda went to the window and looked out.

"Yes," she said, at last. "Be near the music-room at half-past six this evening—perhaps you might bring Mr. Bull, too? The others will be dressing then. Do not speak to me, or even recognize me if we meet in the hall. But as soon as you hear me playing you can come along, and open the door a little." She laughed. "Good morning, Major Walden!" She made a low curtsey and swept out of the room, already the fascinating temptress. Nature, she was angrily aware, had not designed her for this part, nor could she have sustained it once in a thousand times. But this was the thousandth time. "W.J." was an easy victim, and her faculties were screwed to the highest pitch by the desire to astonish the major with the power, brilliance and seduction of her acting. Her malice

against "W.J.", the object of Smith's and Miss Taylor's tedious admiration, was sharpened by the consciousness that the major's coldness was not merely the effect of prudence. The humiliation of "W.J." would be a double triumph.

"Weird girl!" reflected the major, as the door closed. "Damned clever . . . rather startling. . . . Well, that's that!" He rang the bell and ordered a whisky.

.

"W.J." was sitting by the lake. Neither Miss Taylor nor Smith had been near him during the day, and it was now after six. He supposed that they had heard about his stupidity with Martha. Depression and a feeling of uneasiness weighed on him. He shrank from getting up and going back to the Schloss for dinner. They would look at him and sneer and whisper. They were all against him. They hated and despised him. He must leave, go to France, Italy, anywhere, it didn't much matter where.

"Well, Mr. Gleg?"

"W.J." looked up with a start. Hilda was standing on the path, facing him with a quizzical glance.

"What do you want?" snapped "W.J."

He did not like and never had liked the look of the girl.

"What do I want? Why, politeness, Mr. Gleg!"

"The devil you do! And d'you expect to get it from me?"

"In time, Mr. Gleg."

"Oh!" "W.J." was taken aback. He looked more closely at Hilda. The girl had vitality and assurance. What did she want with him?

"Oh, I'm tired of them all up there," she burst out. "Fools and hypocrites! They speak of nothing but you and Martha. But you, too, are stupid, Mr. Gleg. Oh, I

know of your writings! I hear of them at every meal. But can you find no better confidants than a silly boy and an old maid? And must you turn for affection to a fat chambermaid? You geniuses! Have you no eyes?"

"W.J." stared at her, amazed. She spoke with passionate resentment, and resentment was the emotion he felt and sympathized with most easily. So she was angry at being overlooked? He interested her, did he?

"But I am a fool to talk like this." She turned on her heel.

"Don't go!" exclaimed "W.J."

"I have my music to practise—half an hour before I dress for dinner."

"I am going back, too."

Hilda said nothing. They climbed in single file up to the Schloss.

At the top of the track Hilda turned to "W.J."

"Please forget what I have said, Mr. Gleg," she said gently.

She looked at him for a moment with a deep tenderness in her regard.

"Where do you practise?" he asked, huskily.

"In the music-room."

"May I sit there? You play beautifully. It will soothe me. I am tired."

"But certainly!" she smiled, and it seemed to him that his previous opinion of her looks had been quite superficial and obtuse.

They passed Walden in the hall, and went straight to the music-room, which was at the end of a passage on the ground floor of the eastern wing of the Schloss.

A few minutes later Walden, Bull and Fleet approached the music-room. Walden had dug the other two out of the smoking-room to come along and see

“W.J.’s” leg properly pulled, and Bull with enthusiasm, Fleet reluctantly, were following him, all three treading cautiously.

As they went down the passage, a languorous air was being played. Walden grasped the door handle and opened the door a few inches with extreme care. “W.J.” was turning over the music for Hilda. His fingers were trembling, his lips moving. Hilda raised her face towards him from time to time, and gazed at him with troubled eyes.

“By God, she does it well!” thought the major. Bull, looking over the major’s shoulder, strangled a guffaw. Fleet leant against the wall of the passage and yawned, displeased at being there, yet unable to go away.

“Hilda!” cried “W.J.”, and putting his arm round her shoulders bent down to kiss her. She shook him off and jumped up.

“Come in, Major,” she cried. “Come in!” and broke into peals of laughter.

Major Walden threw the door open and burst in, followed by Bull and Fleet. Hilda, her arms akimbo, surveyed “W.J.” with a malice half histrionic, half real. A sense of kinship in unattractiveness worked in her, and the malice swelled to rage and broke in vituperation.

“Oh, you funny, funny little man!” she cried. “You thought I was conquered by your beautiful eyes, did you? How dare you try your tricks on a girl like me? Keep them for your chambermaids, if any chambermaid will look at you.”

She advanced on him and raised her hands as if to strike. “You would try to kiss me! You horrible old man!” Her hands fell. “Bah! I cannot touch you!”

“W.J.” was very pale and beads of sweat gathered on his forehead. With bent arm shielding his face he backed

away from her. Fleet ran forward, took his other arm, and led him out of the room.

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Thanks, thanks! Let me go, please!"

Fleet released his grip, and "W.J." shambled down the passage and disappeared. Returning to the room, Fleet looked at Hilda in silence. Bull embarrassed, was puffing gently. Walden wore a foolish grin. Hilda, spent and frightened, leant against the piano, trying to outstare Fleet.

"You . . ." Fleet's lips seemed to be essaying the second letter of the alphabet. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders and, turning, left the room.

VIII

The next morning, while Smith was dressing, Fleet came in and asked him to accompany him to Frau Dernberger. He was tired of Schloss Bardenstein, he said, and proposed to leave the next morning. Smith expressing surprise, Fleet related with plain vigour the scene in the music-room, discarding his usual mannerisms for the moment. The Schloss, he went on, resuming his plaintive style of talk, had gone bad. He, Fleet, objected to the sex-motif in fiction, and liked it still less in life, and it seemed to have become dominant at the Schloss.

"You, Smith," he said, "have been under my observation of late in this matter, and I am not, speaking as a consultant, quite satisfied with you; and there are other cases of a graver nature. Walden's relations with that poisonous young creature are suspect. Mrs. Walden was not amused by yesterday's incident. She was curious about the origin of the plot, and Walden's replies were irrelevant and obscure. Then there is Bull. I am not

very easy about his occasional trips to Munich. Bull, I fancy, might cry with Tennyson's Galahad:

‘I never felt the kiss of love,
Nor maiden's hand in mine.’

And last of all we have our erratic, impolitic, uncalculating ‘W.J.’ ”

“Poor old chap!” cried Smith. “And he really has genius!”

Fleet shrugged his shoulders. “I shall believe in his genius when he produces something with genius in it,” he said, shortly.

They went along to Frau Dernberger, who was distressed by Fleet's decision. “The second in one morning!” she cried, and explained that Mr. Gleg was leaving for Munich by the 11:20. She had already packed for him. “It is strictly forbidden to me by Herr Melmoth,” she went on, “to return any of this month's payment. Mr. Gleg was very nice about it. He was so gentle, he made no talk about it at all.”

Smith translated Frau Dernberger.

“Yes, it would be strictly forbidden,” said Fleet. “Well, I shall have a chat with Crumpet on my return. Don't bother the poor woman. It's not her fault.”

Smith and Miss Taylor were alone at breakfast. He told her about the practical poke and that “W.J.” was leaving by the 11:20. Miss Taylor was too much distressed to say anything, and soon left the table.

After breakfast Smith went in search of “W.J.” He was very sorry that “W.J.” was leaving, and vaguely remorseful. “Poor old buffer,” he thought, “what a dickens of a time he's had!”

“W.J.” was not at his usual seat, but Smith found him at last by the lake.

The expression on "W.J.'s" face, as he turned at Smith's approach, surprised the youth by its serenity. But "W.J." looked old; for the first time, Smith realized. The angry vitality which had informed every word and movement was gone.

"I'm awfully sorry you're leaving, Mr. Gleg," blurted Smith.

"W.J." nodded.

The tears and rage and convulsions of the night hours had worn him out, leaving him in a happy lassitude; his mood still coloured by the fading beauty of a moment at daybreak.

He had waked up with a start, and stumbled half asleep to the window. To his senses, refined by exhaustion, the dawn landscape revealed itself as the world which he had always divined behind the heat and confusion of the common hours, and desired so terribly. Fearing the spell might break if he looked too long, he crept back to bed filled with the assurance of an immortality awaiting him among the hills and waters of that bright and silent land, lying out there, beyond the darkness of his room.

"You're going by the 11.20, aren't you, sir?" said Smith.

"W.J." roused himself. "Yes," he said. "I had better be getting along. They are sending the luggage down."

"May I come with you?"

"Certainly, certainly."

At this moment Miss Taylor emerged from the track that connected Schloss Bardenstein with the lake, and came running along the path. She was carrying an envelope which she thrust into "W.J.'s" hand.

"Good-bye," she gasped. "A pleasure and a privilege! —to help in publication. Good-bye!"

Before “W.J.” could say anything she turned and disappeared up the track.

The envelope contained a cheque for £25.

“W.J.” took out his pocket-book, folded the cheque, and put it carefully in.

“I have been watching the reflection of that poplar in the lake,” he said, as he and Smith set off—“It is very beautiful.” After a short silence he added—“A small dog passed me just now. Large ears. It sneezed—utchoo!—very quaint and charming.” Nothing further was said during the walk. On arriving at the station, Smith secured a corner seat for “W.J.” and saw to the registration of his luggage.

“Good-bye, Smith,” said “W.J.” leaning out of the window. The look of age and exhaustion was already passing. “Tell Miss Taylor it’s all over, rage, unrest, division within, everything. I’ll send her my book, quite soon, it won’t take me long now. Thank her and bless her from me, Smith.” The train began to move. “I won’t write now, tell her to wait for the book, I can always find her through her publishers. Good-bye, Smith, good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Mr. Gleg.”

The train moved on. “W.J.” leant from the window and waved his hand. Tears came into Smith’s eyes. Poor old “W.J.”—how happy he looked at last.

Four days later a telegram arrived for Smith. It ran :

“Delighted if you would meet the 6.15 from Munich am arriving on tour of inspection tell no one.

“Melmoth Managing Director Continental Comfort.”

Smith and Miss Taylor walked down to Andernach together. It was agreed, as the telegram was theoretically

private, that Miss Taylor should leave Smith at the station.

"Just a week to-day since I arrived and you met me," said Miss Taylor, as they approached the little wood-built station. "What years it seems!" She sighed. The memory of "W.J." was always with her. Where was he now, she wondered, had he settled down comfortably, was he working well and easily?

"Perhaps Mr. Melmoth has news of Mr. Gleg," she murmured. "Will you ask him, please? I'd better leave you now."

"Well, walk back slowly," Smith suggested. "Crumpet and I'll catch you up. There's the train!"

Melmoth was out of the train before it had come to a standstill. He wore a pearl-grey suit of woollen whipcord, a light overcoat to match, and straw hat. A neat bow-tie completed the effect of a trim and businesslike personage; while the large horn spectacles lifted the total impression above the merely humdrum.

"Ah! God is good to me once more," he cried, catching sight of Smith. Dropping a heavy portmanteau, he advanced and clasped Smith's hand. "All well?" he asked. "Everyone in the harbour happy?"

"I wouldn't go as far as that," said Smith, smiling.

"Not? What's happened? Tell me!"

"Oh, nothing terrible. No murders yet."

Melmoth laughed. "I praise God daily for my sense of humour," he said. "You have it, too. Take everything else from me, but leave me my sense of humour. The car is here, I suppose?"

"No, it isn't. Your telegram said 'tell no one.' We can take a carriage up, or send down for your bag."

"Let me think! There is a train back to Munich at 7:12." He clasped his head with both hands; then shot

into the waiting-room, and presently emerged without his portmanteau.

"The station-master is sitting on it," he explained. "I have refreshed his spirit mightily with certain indications about the future of Continental Comfort in this quarter of the globe. But let us walk towards Schloss Bardenstein and explore the situation."

They set off, and Melmoth continued—"The position is this. I have not a moment to spare—an urgent appointment in Munich to-night. On the other hand it might be well and wise to come back with you for the purpose of registering mutual goodwill and sympathy all round. Tell me: what am I to do? I place myself in your hands. Your 'aura' pleases me. You may remember I told you so in London."

"Well, if you've such an important engagement, I don't see that there's much point in wasting a night at the Schloss. As to registering goodwill, I don't think you'll get much assistance from Walden, at any rate."

"Walden! I remember him. A nasty bit of work. His 'aura' filled me with dismay. Light green with pink spots."

"Why, damn it, you told me in London that I would find him a charming fellow; the best Army type, you said."

"No, Smith, I couldn't have said that, because my impression of him was the exact opposite. But what of the Baron?"

"Oh, he left ages ago! Surely you knew that!"

"He hasn't returned then?"

"No."

"Strange! He wrote me he was returning this week."

"You're pretty quick," said Smith, and Melmoth, after a moment's indecision, laughed.

"I suppose you know Fleet's cleared out," said Smith.

"Fleet! Cleared out! How God makes me suffer! But I distrusted Fleet. 'Aura' clamped to his head with croquet hoops—no possibilities of expansion."

"Gleg's cleared out, too."

"Gleg? Of course—that's the fellow's name. I saw him last night in Munich. An awkward piece of work, cramp in the pit of his spiritual stomach. But I thought he was just up for the night. Cleared out, too! How God persecutes me!"

"You saw Gleg, did you? One moment. Miss Taylor!"

Miss Taylor, who was a little distance ahead, turned round and waited till they came up.

Melmoth took Miss Taylor's hand and scrutinized her piercingly. "This air has worked wonders with you," he said, at last.

"Mr. Melmoth," Smith interrupted, "saw Mr. Gleg last night in Munich. Tell us about him, Melmoth. How was he looking?"

Melmoth halted. "Is he a particular friend of either of you?" he asked, impressively.

Miss Taylor gave a frightened gasp, but Smith answered lightly—"Oh, no! but we're interested in him. Quite a character."

"Good!" said Melmoth. "Miss Taylor, you are a woman of the world. The story is a simple one, and can be simply told. I saw Gleg last night in a Munich café. I recognized him, but couldn't for my life put a name to him, and I doubt if he could have put a name to himself. Tight as a Tonga boy.¹ He was flanked on either side by a couple of fierce articles who were absorbing champagne

¹The Black Boys of Tonga were noted for their sustained intemperance in the line, and their spasmodic ferocity behind it.

at maximum velocity. A third speedily blew along and, after some back-chat with her colleagues, staked out a claim and ordered a complete outfit of wines and liqueurs.

"The old ruin made a stout attempt at festive expansion, bit one of 'em in the arm, tried a song, and handed out wads of notes all round. After which he collapsed, and when they woke him up to pay the bill, went right off the deep end, registering loathing of them and much private remorse. Then *they* hit the ceiling and, having gutted him completely, urged the waiter to quod the old boy for ordering stuff without cash to back his requisitions. At which stage I got busy, put the waiter wise, and organized a forced levy. When it was all over, bar the shouting which is probably still going strong, I offered to escort our friend to his bower; whereupon he woke up for the second time, damned me heartily, and staggered off."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Smith. "Poor old chap! And I thought he was really going to turn over a new leaf. What an awful pity! And the worst of it is he really has got genius."

The word "genius" recalled Melmoth to himself. Business, he told Smith, was not his real line. Of course, he had a *flair* for it. His trouble was that there didn't seem to be anything he hadn't got a *flair* for. But Nature had intended him, primarily, for a singer. Smith was inattentive, and at last Melmoth broke off.

"Well!" he said. "I'll leave you. You are right. It would be a waste of time to spend a night here."

"You're sure there's a train back at 7.12?" Smith queried.

"If my feelings do not betray me."

He shook hands with Miss Taylor and Smith, expressed himself at ease about the general situation, hoped he

would hear from them repeatedly, and, recommending Touraine when, if ever, they should weary of Bavaria, turned and left them, carolling as he strode down the road:

“Wenn ich früh im Garten geh’
In meiner grünen Hut,
Dann ist mein erster Gedanke
Was wohl der Liebste tut.”

“Awfully amusing fellow, and really not a bad sort,” said Smith, glancing at Miss Taylor furtively.

Miss Taylor was very pale. “The swine!” thought Smith. “To spend her money like that! Genius or no genius.” But he did not care to say anything. She looked too cut up; and besides she would probably stick up for Gleg.

As they drew near the castle, Smith saw old Frau Schreiner enjoying the warm evening on her bench by the main entrance.

Smith thought of them all: “W.J.” and Miss Taylor, Louise, Hilda, the Waldens, Fleet, even Bull, and looked again at the old woman, wrinkled and placid.

“She’s well out of it!” he muttered.

Marie came out to warn her grandmother that it was time to go in—the sun had nearly set. Miss Taylor hurried past them into the castle.

“By the lake at nine?” whispered Smith. Marie nodded, giving her arm to the old woman, who leaned heavily on it.

Smith, drawing back to let them pass in, was moved by the contrast of age and youth.

“Poor old thing!” thought Smith.

NAOMI MITCHISON

THE HOSTAGES

THERE were only three of us left now ; the others had been hung over the ramparts, one every morning. Phabion was still sick and we didn't know what to do with him ; he was only a child, and cried for his mother at nights ; some of the others had done that, and I would have too, but I was fifteen and had to set them an example. They used to take us out on to the walls, and whip us where the men from our own Cities could see us ; of course they had the right to do it, but some of us weren't very old, and used to cry even at the thought of it, which was bad for everyone. But we could look out when we were taken up, and there was our camp, spread and shining below us ; once there was an attack while we were there and we all cheered, but the Romans paid us back in kicks for that. I saw the banner of Mireto from time to time, and thought I could make out my father at the head of the spearmen, and my big brother with him ; and once I saw a herald whom I knew, and called out to him, but he didn't hear me. Every day we hoped the town would fall, though we should very likely be killed before anyone could get to us ; still, it was a chance, and better than being dragged out and choked like dogs at the end of a rope. We knew our people were pressing hard and might soon starve the town out ; for the last week they

had given us nothing but water and a very little bread; the one who was chosen to be hung every morning used to leave his share of the bread to anyone he liked. There wasn't too much water, either; the last day Tannes and I had given it all to Phabion; we thought we should be able to eat his bread—he wouldn't touch it—but we were too thirsty.

I was awake all that night, though Tannes slept for a little. I leant up against the wall, with Phabion's head on my shoulder; he seemed easier that way. I thought about home, and tried to imagine I was in my own room; I wondered if they were looking after my pony properly and I tried to remember whether I'd mended the bridle before I was sent away as a hostage to the Romans; I couldn't be sure, and it worried me.

When it was just light Tannes woke up and said he heard shouting; we both listened and I heard it too. He went over to the slit, but of course he could see nothing; he used always to think he would see something some day. But certainly there was cheering, and Tannes said he was sure we'd taken the town; it wasn't the first time he'd thought that though, and I knew he must be wrong when nothing else happened for hours. My back was very sore from the beating, and we'd had no chance of a wash for weeks. Phabion was better after his sleep, and thirsty, but the water was all gone.

Then the door opened and the man we called the Boar—we all hated him—came in. I wondered which of us he was going to take and rather hoped it would be Tannes, because I was much better at looking after Phabion: I didn't want it to be *him* anyhow. Tannes asked what had happened—he never could learn not to—and the man hit his hand with the iron key and then said, "The General's come and your people have all run away." That



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NAOMI MITCHISON



was hard hearing for us; we knew it couldn't be true about our army having run, but they might have had to withdraw: so we were very unhappy. But we said nothing and waited. He went on: "You dogs, you ought to be hung, but the General's begged your lives and you've been given to him."

We didn't quite understand at once, and then a great, tall man came in, all in armour, with a golden helmet plumed with a black horse-tail: he could only stand upright in the middle of the arch. He looked at us and asked, "Are these all that are left?" The Boar stood at attention as he said, "Yes, sir," and then to us, "Down on your knees before your master!" I don't remember what Tannes did, but I simply sat and stared at the General; one can't think very quickly after one hasn't slept all night. The Boar came over and hit me on the mouth, and I was afraid he was going to hit Phabion; so I knelt, and Phabion knelt, leaning against me, and Tannes knelt in the other corner.

The light came in through the doorway, behind the General, and he looked very big, as if he could tread us into the ground; a little wind came in too, and I heard the horse hairs rustling against the bronze. He was speaking to us, but I didn't hear it all; I was thinking that we were going to live, and I was glad and thankful, and then I thought that our army was beaten and perhaps my father and brother were killed; I felt that I loved Mireto, my City, terribly, and that it would be awful if the Romans were to take her: and then I thought it might be better to die after all. I heard the General saying that our lives were forfeit but that he had asked that we should be spared, and then about how wicked it was of the League of the Cities to have broken the Treaty with Rome; I was wondering if it was any use my telling him that bad

treaties ought to be broken, but just then Phabion slipped forward and I had to catch him; he felt very hot and was breathing fast. The General came up to us and stooped over him; Phabion threw his arms round my neck and held on tight with his face pressed into my shoulder. The General said, "Don't be frightened," and lifted his head quite gently; he asked how long he'd been like this, and I told him ten days, and said could we have some water for him. He asked if we had not had any, and I said yes, but that Phabion had drunk his share and our share too, but he was all burnt up inside and always wanted more. He turned round to the Boar, and the metal plates on his kilt swung against my face; he told him to get us water, and then felt Phabion's head and hands, and told me he thought he would live. When the water came Phabion let go of me with one hand, and drank, and looked up at the General, and Tannes drank, and then I drank. I've never tasted anything as good as that water; I felt quite different at once, and I would have spoken to the General to justify our Cities, only he went out.

That day we had dried figs with our bread, and in the evening they brought some milk for Phabion. We heard how the General had marched up secretly and surprised and scattered our camp and relieved the town; a few days afterwards the Boar told us peace had been made. Some of the Cities were given up to Rome, and the walls of Mireto had to be pulled down. Tannes and I talked it over; we wondered whether we ought to outlive the disgrace—*his* City was to pay tribute and have Rome for overlord—but finally we made up our minds to go on living for a little longer at least; we didn't quite know how to kill ourselves, and besides there was Phabion: his City had to pay tribute too, but he didn't understand the shame of it like we did.

By the time they let us out Phabion was much better, but we were none of us very strong. They tied us into a wagon; we sat on the bottom, out of the sun, and saw the tops of the trees we passed under along the road, not much else. The journey took eleven days, and then we stopped outside the walls of Rome. There was dust all over everything, dust in our hair and ears and eye-lashes, dust caked on our hands and feet, white dust on the bread and fruit we ate. The wagon was drawn up on the inside of a square, and we sat on the edge trying to see what was happening. Prisoners—our own men—were brought in under guard, formed up and chained; of course we all looked hard to see if there was anyone we knew among them; often we thought we saw faces of friends, but they never were. Then one of my father's men was marched past and I shouted to him; he turned and called to me that my father had escaped but he didn't know about my brother; still, that was something. There were women prisoners too, from the towns that had been taken, and armour and horses and gold cups from the altars of the gods. Tannes saw one cart-load from his own City and raged at being so helpless. And then Phabion cried out and said he saw his cousin among the women, a white-faced girl with eyes swollen from tears and dust; we all called, but she didn't hear or heed, and Phabion was terribly disappointed.

Then we were taken out of the wagon over to a heap of chains and one of the soldiers found light ones for us. Then we waited at the edge of the road till our turn came. The Roman soldiers went by first, crowned and singing; after them our prisoners, chained together; and more Romans; and trophies of swords and spears, and the pick of the cattle that had been taken; and more Romans; and a great line of women and children, and pictures of

the battles, and ox-carts full of gold and silver, well guarded; and more Romans still, and more prisoners; and we were bitterly angry and sad. Then there was a place for us and we joined the march with Roman soldiers in front of us and at each side.

At first there was nothing but choking dust, until we got to the suburbs, where the streets had been watered, which kept the dust down and was pleasant to the feet. But then the crowds began, crowds of shouting enemies at the two edges of the road; they frightened me more than anything, we were so helpless and alone in the middle of them, and sometimes the noise would suddenly swell up into a roar all round us and Phabion would shrink close to me. Once or twice they threw things at us, but nothing sharp enough to cut. A man who walked in front of us kept repeating in a shout that we were the hostages from the Cities who were spared by order of the General and that the rest were hung. He said it over and over again like a corn-crake; I would have given a lot to kill that man. We must have had seven or eight miles to walk in the sun at the pace of the slowest oxen; at first I looked about me and whispered to the others from time to time and sang our marching song under my breath, but later I was too tired to do anything but stumble along with my head down. My hands were chained behind my back, so that I couldn't even wipe the sweat off my forehead or the dust out of my eyes. About half-way Tannes cut his foot on a sharp stone and fell, but one of the guards picked him up and helped him along. I was miserable about Phabion; he wasn't well yet and the sun was burning on our heads; he knew he must go through the day without whimpering for the honour of his City, and he did it well, but I could feel how much it was costing him and I could do nothing to help him. I was

thankful when the soldier on his side said, "I've a child of my own," and took him on to his shoulder for part of the way. The day seemed endless, but suddenly we were halted in a great square place where someone was speaking from the top of a flight of steps. I saw the General a long way off, wearing a laurel wreath and a purple robe, but I was too tired to see much; all those great white buildings were swimming in the heat and there wasn't a breath of wind to blow away the smell, that seemed everywhere, of leather and onions and the hot crowd.

When the Triumph was over and our chains were taken off, we were locked up in a little barred room, a prison of some sort, with straw on the flagstones. We lay there, thankful for the dark and quiet, and slept like the dead all night. The first day a woman who seemed too dazed to speak brought us food; the second day another woman brought it: she was Phabion's cousin. He rushed up to her with, "Where's mother?" and she burst into tears and put her arms round him. She had seen his father dead of wounds, and knew his mother and the baby sister were burned in a house with some other women who had tried to escape from the soldiers. But she could hardly speak about it; something terrible must have happened to her too; and she mightn't stay with us. Phabion cried all that day, and even while he slept he was sobbing and calling, "Mother, mother!" I couldn't bear it, I put my hands over my ears so as not to hear, but I knew it was going on all the time, and I couldn't sleep at all. Tannes was very much upset; he seemed to have thought that when it was all over he could go back to the old life, but this showed him that he couldn't; perhaps it was lucky for him that his mother was dead years before. Mireto had not been sacked, so my mother and sisters should have been safe and I knew my father had escaped, but my brother might

be killed or anything. And besides, I was the eldest and I realized it all the better : how this was the end of the League of the Cities, our gods were powerless, and our hope and honour in ashes.

The next morning we were taken away again ; we were used to obeying orders now. An old soldier with a black beard was in charge of us ; he wouldn't answer questions or let us talk among ourselves much. As we went through the streets a woman recognized us and threw a dead rat : it hit Phabion ; but I was glad it wasn't a brick. We had a long way to walk (though we got a lift for a few miles on a wagon that was leaving the town empty), first along one of the big main ways that went out between houses and gardens, under arches, and right into the country ; then along a lane with deep ruts, beside vineyards and cornfields. It was past noon when we came to a long, low house with a walled garden where there were pomegranate trees. There was no one to be seen, and the soldier stopped, sat down on the bottom step of the ones that led up to the house door, and ate bread and onions.

We sat on the ground beside him and waited, and the afternoon got hotter and hotter ; we were all very tired. We'd had nothing to eat since early that morning—we hoped the soldier would give us something, but he didn't, and of course we wouldn't ask. Tannes was complaining of his foot which was badly swollen ; I tied it up with fresh grass and a strip torn from my own tunic. Phabion was crying all the time, quite hopelessly ; his face was streaked with dirt and tears, and his hair was tangled into grey knots all over his head. I was unhappy enough myself ; I tried to tell them stories, but that reminded us of home and made it all the worse. Phabion put his head down on my knee, and I could feel his hot little face, wet against my skin. Tannes cried every time he moved his

foot, and I was near it myself, but I thought of our being among the enemy and that we must show we were men. Still nobody came; sometimes we heard a cock crowing behind the house and once a reaper passed through the trees in front of us with a scythe over his shoulder, but he never looked our way.

Then we heard voices inside the house, and a lady came out on to the steps, with a maid carrying a basket behind her. The soldier saluted and spoke to her; she was all in blue with the western sun on her face and hair. She ran down the steps and saw us. "Oh!" she said, "Oh—you children! You poor children!" and in a moment she was beside me and had gathered Phabion up in her arms; he lay there limp, with eyes half-shut, still crying. "Have you been here all day?" she asked, "with nothing to eat?" I nodded, and she called up to the maid to bring food and drink quickly. I was glad to see how angry she was with the soldier; she sent him away and sat down on the steps, with Phabion on her knee sobbing a little less. The maid brought milk and barley cakes and pears and grapes; we ate everything and she fed Phabion herself. Then the General came round from the other side of the garden; I knew him at once, though he was wearing a woollen tunic and sandals instead of armour. The bailiff was with him, but we didn't know who he was till afterwards. I stood up, and his wife stood up holding Phabion to her breast.

He looked at us kindly enough and told the bailiff to take Tannes and me down to the pool to wash. We went with him, Tannes limping badly; it was a broad shallow stone basin, with sun-flowers growing round it. We stripped and went in and washed off layers and layers of dust and sweat, and swam among the lily pads till he told us to come out. They brought us clean clothes and we put

them on with our hair dripping; he took us back to the house, to a clean, light room with blankets spread on the floor, and Tannes sat on a table while someone bandaged his foot properly. Then Phabion came in and told us how the women of the house had washed him and dressed him and been kind to him, and he lay down on the blankets and I covered him, and he went to sleep almost at once. Then the General sent for me; he was sitting alone in a tall chair, with the lamps behind him. He asked me if I thought we should be ransomed; I said I believed Tannes and I would be, but that Phabion's father and mother were both killed, so I couldn't tell about him. He sent me away, and the mistress met me in the hall and asked if Phabion was asleep.

The next day we were left alone most of the time, to eat and rest, but after that, when Tannes' foot was better, we were given work to do about the farm and garden, under the bailiff. It wasn't hard—getting in the grapes and apples, feeding the geese, driving the cows home, and so on. Phabion got well wonderfully quickly, and forgot his mother for hours together; the mistress petted him a lot, and the General spoke to him whenever he saw him.

But the weeks went on and the autumn was going; there were frosts at night; once round the pond and out was as far as we cared to swim. But none of us heard anything from our homes. And then one day the General sent for Tannes to tell him he'd been ransomed and his uncle was waiting to take him away. In an hour he'd said good-bye to us, and was gone; I've never seen him since. Of course Phabion and I were glad for his sake, but it made me wonder what was going to happen to me; I thought of all sorts of things: perhaps the soldier might have been wrong about my father; perhaps he was dead and my brother was dead, and all our money was gone;

perhaps I should never see Mireto and my mother and our house again. Everyone was good to us, but of course we were no more free than any of the slaves, and I didn't like to think of all my life being like that. At one time I thought of running away, but I should probably have been caught and anyhow I should have had to leave Phabion; I had a plan that my father should ransom him too, and he should come back and live with us and be my little brother, now that he had no one of his own kin left. We used to talk about that in the evenings.

But it was winter now; we were busy pruning the vines and fruit trees; Phabion worked with me, but of course I had longer hours and did more. After it was dark the mistress used often to have us in and we sat with them, making withy plaits, while the General talked about farming and wild beasts and told us all his adventures. Sometimes he talked about Rome, things she had done in the past, things he said she would do in the future. I thought about Mireto and said nothing, but Phabion seemed to believe it. We worshipped with them too: the country gods are the same all the world over. Sometimes we went out after wolves, and once I was in the thick of it, when either a hound or the wolf bit me in the arm. Looking back on it all now, it seems such a waste of time that I didn't really enjoy it; but then I didn't know what had happened at home.

One day I was coming up to the house with my pruning knife and a great bundle of prunings to burn; Phabion had gone in, but I had stayed to finish the row and it was nearly dark. I heard hoofs behind me, turned, and there was my father! I threw down the bundle and ran to him and he was off his horse and had me in his arms, all in a moment. The horse grazed by the roadside and we talked. Of course I asked first about mother and every-

one. "My little son," he said, "you didn't hear all this long time! All's well at home, but you know I'd spent all our money in arming my men; there was nothing left, and I had all I could do to raise enough to buy you both back. Did you know your brother was taken prisoner during the siege? I couldn't find him for a long time; he had been sold as a slave in the Roman market and I bought him back first: he was having a bad time. But I thought you would be well treated here—they've not been unkind to you, son?" He looked at the bundle of wood, and then at the bound place on my arm where I'd had the wolf bite. I told him they'd all been kind, and what sort of life it was; he put me up on his horse—it was fine to be riding again!—with the prunings behind, and we went up to the house. The General met my father and took him in, and I led the horse round to the stables and bedded him down.

When I came in they'd settled my ransom and father said we should go home the next day. I was so happy I could hardly think, and then, with a jump, I remembered Phabion. "Oh, father," I said, "can't you buy back my friend too? He's got no one left and I told him I'd take him home with me." Father looked miserable and said he couldn't—I found out later how hard the ransom money had been to come by—but that he'd try to later, for the honour of the Cities. But the General said: "I don't want to have Phabion ransomed; I've another plan for him. Call him and we'll see." He came in, and the mistress with him; he ran over to me and took my hands: "Oh, you're going," he said, "you're going back to your mother and I shall be left all alone!" But the General leaned forward, saying, "Phabion, you know I've no children of my own. Will you come and live with me always and be my son?" And the mistress spoke softly

to him: "Stay with us dear." And Phabion looked at them and looked at me, and then looked down on the floor, wondering. And I said: "Think of your City, Phabion! Don't put yourself into the hands of the enemy." And he said to me: "Would it be very wrong to stay? I think I'd like to stay." I would have spoken, but my father stopped me and spoke himself: "You know that I'm of the Cities, child, on your side: so you can trust me. And I advise you to stay."

Then Phabion went over to the mistress and put his arms round her neck, and she and the General kissed him and called him son. And the General gave back the ransom money to my father, and said to me that while there was peace I should always be welcome in his house.

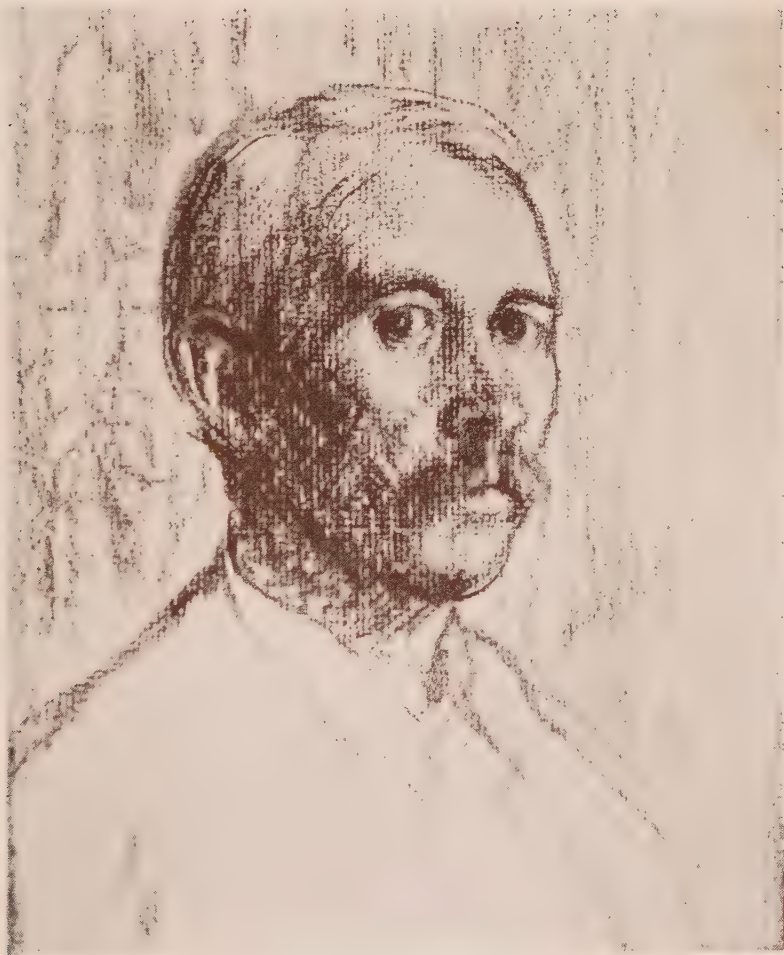
The next day father and I set out for home. Phabion came with us as far as the main road, and there we said good-bye to one another. Phabion went back to the house, and father and I struck out over the hills for Mireto. We were back within the week, and everything was right again. I found I hadn't mended my pony's bridle, after all, but my brother had done it for me after he came home.

C. E. MONTAGUE

IN HANGING GARDEN GULLY

To climb up rocks is like all the rest of your life, only simpler and safer. In all the rest of your life, any work you may do, by way of a trade, is a taking of means to some end. That end may be good. We hope it is. But who can be sure? Misgiving is apt to steal in. Are you a doctor—is it your job to keep all the weak ones alive? Then are you not spoiling the breed for the future? Are you a parson or politician or some sort of public improver, always trying to fight evil down? May you not then be making a muff every day of somebody else who ought to have had his dragon to fight, with his own bow and spear, when you rushed in to rob him and the other little St. Georges of discipline and of victory? Anyhow, all the good ends seem a good long way off, and the ways to them dim. You may be old by the time you are there. The salt may have lost half its savour.

No such dangers or doubts perplex the climber on rocks. He deals, day by day, with the Ultimate Good, no doubt in small nips, but still authentic and not watered down. His senses thrill with delight to find that he is just the sum of his own simple powers. He lives on, from moment to moment, by early man's gleeful achievement of balance on one foot out of four. He hangs safe by a single hand that learnt its good grip in fifty thousand years of precarious dodging among forest boughs, with



C. E. MONTAGUE

the hungry snakes looking up from the ground for a catch, like the expectant fieldsmen in the slips. The next little ledge, the object of all human hope and desire, is only some twelve feet away—about the length of the last leap of that naked bunch of clenched and quivering muscles, from whom you descend, at the wild horse that he had stalked through the grass. Each time that you get up a hard pitch you have succeeded in life. Besides, no one can say you have hurt him.

Care will come back in the end: the clouds return after the rain; but for those first heavenly minutes of sitting secure and supreme at the top of Moss Ghyll or the Raven Crag Gully you are Columbus when he saw land from the rigging and Gibbon when he laid down his pen in the garden house at Lausanne. It's good for you, too; it makes you more decent. No one, I firmly believe, could be utterly mean on the very tip of the Weiss horn. I could if I had known the way, have written a lyric about these agreeable truths as I sat by myself in the tiny inn at Llyn Ogwen where Telford's great London-to-Holyhead road climbs over a pass between three-thousand-foot Carnedd's and Glyders. I was a convalescent then, condemned still to a month of rest cure for body and mind. But it was June, and fine weather. Rocks had lately become dry and warm.

There are places in Britain where rock-climbing cannot honestly be called a rest cure. I mean, for the body. Look at the Coolin—all the way that a poor invalid must tramp from Sligachan southward before he gets among the rough, trusty, prehensile gabbro, the best of all God's stones. Think of Scawfell Crag, the finest crag in the world, but its base cut off from the inn by all that Sisyphean plod up the heart-breaking lengths of Brown Tongue. From Ogwen you only need walk half an hour,

almost on the flat, and then——there you are, at the foot of your climb. The more I considered the matter, the more distinctly could I perceive that my doctor, when saying "Avoid all violent exercise," meant that if ever I got such an opening as this for a little "steady six-furlong work," as it is called in the training reports, I ought to take care not to miss it.

But I was the only guest at the inn. And to climb alone is counted a sin against the spirit of the sport. All the early fathers of climbing held the practice heretical. Certainly some of them—Whymper, Tyndall, and others—climbed by themselves when they had a mind to. Thus did King David, on distinguished occasions, relax the general tensivity of his virtue. But these exceptions could not obscure the general drift of the law and the prophets of mountaineering. Then came another pause-giving reflection. If, as the Greeks so delicately put it, anything incurable happens while you are climbing alone, your clay is exposed, defenceless and dumb, to nasty *obiter dicta* during the inquest. "Woe unto him," as Solomon says, "who is alone when he falleth!" Insensate rustic coroners and juries, well as they may understand that riding to hounds in a stone-wall country is one of the choicer forms of prudence, will prose and grumble over extinct mountaineers. Their favourite vein is the undesirable one of their brother, the First Clown in *Hamlet*, who thought it a shame that "great folk" like Ophelia (she seems to have slipped up while climbing a tree) "should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves, more than their even Christian."

No mean impediments these to a sensitive, conscientious nature's design for seeking health and joy among the attractive gullies and slabs that surround Llyn Idwal. Against them I marshalled all that I could remember of

St. Paul's slighting observations on the law; also any agility that I had gained in the Oxford Greats school in resolving disagreeable discords into agreeable higher harmonies. Black was certainly not white. Still, as the good Hegelian said, black might, after all, be an aspect of white. In time it was duly clear to my mind that sin lies not in the corporal act, but in the thoughts of the sinner. So long as the heart sincerely conversed with the beauty of the truths on which rested the rule of never climbing alone it mattered little what the mere legs did: your soul was not in your legs. One of casuistry's brightest triumphs had been fairly won, my liberty gained, my intellectual integrity saved, my luncheon sandwiches ordered for eight in the morning—when somebody else arrived at the inn.

He stood confessed a botanist—he had the large green cylindrical can of the tribe, oval in section and hung by a strap from the shoulder, like the traditional *vivandières* little cask in French art. He was also, I found while we smoked through that evening together, a good fellow. He had, too, a good leg, if one only. The other was stiff and unbendable at the knee. He had broken it last year, he said, and the bones seemed to have set only too hard, or else Nature had gracelessly grudged to the mended knee-joint of her lover a proper supply of whatever substitute she uses for ball bearings.

His name was Darwin. "No relation, really," he humbly assured me. His father was only some obscure squire. The son's Christian name had been Charles at the font, but on coming of age the dear fellow had felt it immodest to prey any more than he need upon his eponymous hero's thrice-honoured names. So he had meekly converted the Charles by deed poll into Thomas. This lowly and beautiful gesture convinced me, as you

may suppose, that here was the man to go climbing with. He was indeed one of the innocent, one-thoughted kind that wake up happy each day and never turn crusty, and always think you are being too good to them.

One lure alone had drawn him to these outworks of Snowdon. Some eccentric flower grew on these heights, and a blank page in one of his books of squashed specimens ached for it. Was it so lovely? I asked, like a goose. He was too gentle to snub me. But all that fellow's thoughts shone out through his face. Every flower that blew—to this effect did his soul mildly rebuke mine—was beauteous beyond Helen's eyes. All he said was: "No, not fair, perhaps, to outward view as many roses be; but, just think!—it grows on no patch of ground in the world but these crags!"

"It is not merely better dressed," said I, "than Solomon. It is wiser."

It was about then, I think, that the heart of the man who had gone mad on the green-stuff and that of the man who knew what was what, in the way of a recreation, rushed together like Paolo's and Francesca's. What had already become an *entente cordiale* ripened at tropical speed into an alliance. Darwin had found a second, half-invalided perhaps, but still the holder of two unqualified legs, for to-morrow's quest of his own particular Grail. To me it now seemed to be no accident that Darwin had come to the inn: it was ordained, like the more permanent union of marriage, for a remedy against sin, and to avoid climbing alone.

We got down to business at once. A charming gully, I told him, led right up to the big crag over Cwm Idwal. Not Twll Du, the ill-famed Devil's Kitchen. That, I frankly said, was justly *detestata matribus*—wet and rotten and lethal, and quite flowerless too. My gully,

though close to that man-eating climb, was quite another affair. Mine was the place for town children to spend a happy day in the country: the very place also for starting the day's search for the object of Darwin's desire. In saying this, too, I was honest. Lots of plants grow in some gullies; ferns, mosses, grasses, all sorts of greens flourish in a damp cleft, like hair in an armpit; why not one kind of waste rabbit-food as well as another? You see, I had not been a casuist merely, before Darwin came. I had used the eyes heaven gave me, and reconnoitred the gully well from below, and if any flower knew how to tell good from bad, in the way of a scramble, it would be there. I ended upon a good note. The place's name, I said impressively, was Hanging Garden Gully, no doubt because of the rich indigenous flora.

His eyes shone at that, and we went straight to the kitchen to ask Mrs. Jones for the loan of a rope. I had none with me that journey: the sick are apt to relinquish improvidently these necessities of a perfect life. Now, in the classics of mountaineering the right thing in such cases of improvised enterprise is that the landlady lends you her second-best clothesline. Far happier we, Mrs. Jones having by her a 120-foot length of the right Alpine rope, with the red worsted thread in its middle. It had been left in her charge by a famous pillar of the Scottish Mountaineering Club till he should come that way again. "The gentleman," Mrs. Jones told us, "said I was always to let any climbing gentlemen use it." Heaven was palpably smiling upon our attempt.

The sun smiled benedictively, too, on the halt and the sick as they stood, about nine the next morning, roping up at the foot of their climb. "A fisherman's bend," I took care to explain, as I knotted one end of the rope round Darwin's chest.

"The botanical name," he replied—"did I tell you?—is *Lloydia*." How some men do chatter when they are happy! Can't carry their beans.

We were not likely to need the whole 120 feet of the rope. So I tied myself on at its middle and coiled the odd 60 feet round my shoulder. "A double overhand knot," I confessed, as I tightened it round me. "A bad knot, but for once it may do us no harm."

"The vernacular name," said the garrulous fellow, "is spiderwort."

"Tut, tut!" I inwardly said.

The lower half of that gully was easier than it had looked: just enough in it to loosen your muscles and make you want more. Higher up, the gully grew shallow and had greater interest. The top part of all, as I remember it now, might be called either a chimney or crack, being both. In horizontal section, it was a large obtuse angle indented into the face of the crag. The crag at this part, and the gully's bed with it, rose at an angle of some 60 degrees. Now, when you climb rock at an angle of 60 degrees the angle seems to be just 90. In early mountaineering records the pioneers often say, "Our situation was critical. Above us the crag rose vertical," or, "To descend was impossible now. But in front the rocky face, for some time perpendicular, had now begun to overhang." If you take a clinometer to the scenes of some of those liberal estimates you blush for your kind. The slope of the steepest—and easiest—ridge of the three by which the Matterhorn is climbed is only 39 degrees. But this, though not purely digressive, is partly so. All that strictly had to be said was that an upright and very obtuse-angled trough in smooth rock that rises at 60 degrees cannot be climbed.

But in the very bed of our trough there had been

eroded, from top to bottom, a deepish irregular crack in the rock. Into this crack, at most parts, you could stick a foot, a knee, or an arm. Also, the sides of the large obtuse angle, when you looked closely, were not utterly smooth. On the right wall, as we looked up, certain small wrinkles, bunions, and other minute but lovable diversities in the face of the stone gave promise of useful points of resistance for any right boot that might scrape about on the wall in the hope of exerting auxiliary lateral pressure, while the left arm and thigh, hard at work in the crack, wriggled you up by a succession of caterpillarish squirms. This delectable passage was 80 feet high, as I measured it with my experienced eye. An inexperienced measuring-tape might have put it at 50. To any new recruit to the cause—above all, to one with a leg as inflexible as the stoniest stone that it pressed—I felt that the place was likely to offer all that he could wish in the line of baptisms of fire. Still, as the pioneers said, to descend was impossible now: the crack was too sweet to be left. And Darwin, thus far, had come up like a lamplighter, really. I told him so, frankly. Alpine guides are the men at psychology. Do they not get the best out of the rawest new client, in any hard place, by ceasing to hide the high estimate that they have formed of his natural endowment for the sport? "*Vous êtes—je vous dis franchement, monsieur—un chamois! Un véritable chat de montagne!*"

I was leading the party. I was the old hand. Besides, I could bend both my knees. Desiring Darwin to study my movements, so that he presently might—so far as conformity would not cramp his natural talents—copy them closely, I now addressed myself to the crack. When half-way up I heard the voice of a good child enduring, with effort, a painful call upon its patience. "Any

Lloydia yet?" it wistfully said. Between my feet I saw Darwin below. Well, he was certainly paying the rope out all right, as I had enjoined; but he did it "like them that dream." His mind was not in it. All the time he was peering hungrily over the slabby containing walls of the gully, and now he just pawed one of them here and there with a tentative foot—you know how a puppy, when first it sees ice, paws the face of the pond. "These botanists!" I thought. "These fanatics!" You know how during a happy physical effort—a race or a hunt, a fight or a game—you think, with a sort of internal quiet, about a lot of old things. There came back to my mind the old lines that I had once had to make Latin verse of:

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their incessant labours see
Crowned from some single herb or tree.

Meanwhile I took a precaution. I first unroped myself. Then I passed the rope, from below, through the space behind a stone that was jammed fast in the crack. Then I roped myself on again, just at my old place on the rope. A plague of a job it was, too, with all those 60 feet of spare rope to uncoil and re-coil. But you see how it worked: I had now got the enthusiast moored. Between him and me the rope went through the eye of a needle, so I could go blithely on. I went. In the top of the crack I found a second jammed stone. It was bigger than number one: in fact, it blocked the way and made you clamber round outside it rather interestingly; but it, too, had daylight showing through a hole behind it. Sounds from below were again improving my natural stock of prudence. You can't, I thought, be too safe. Once more

I unroped, just under this chockstone, and pushed the rope up through the hole at its back. When the rope fell down to me, outward over the top of the stone, I tied on again, just as before, and then scrambled up over the outer side of the stone with an ecstatic pull on both arms, and sat on its top in the heaven that big-game hunters know when they lie up against the slain tiger and smoke.

If you have bent up your mind to take in the details, you will now have an imposing vision of the connections of Darwin and me with each other, and with the Primary or Palæozoic rocks of Cambria. From Darwin, tied on to its end, the rope ran, as freely as a bootlace runs through the eyelets, behind the jammed stone 30 feet above his head, and then again behind my present throne of glory at the top; then it was tied on to me; and then there were 60 feet, half its length, left over to play with.

Clearly Darwin, not being a thread, or even a rope, could not come up the way that the rope did, through the two needle-eyes. Nor did I care, he being the thing that he was, to bid him untie and then to pull up his end of the rope through the eyes, drop it down to him clear through the air, and tell him to tie on again. He was, as the Irish say of the distraught, "fit to be tied," and not at all fit for the opposite. If he were loose he might at any moment espy that Circe of his in some place out of bounds. There seemed to be only one thing to do. I threw down the spare 60 feet of the rope, and told him first to tie himself on to its end, and then, but not before, to untie himself from the other. I could not quite see these orders obeyed. A bulge of rock came between him and my eyes, but I was explicit. "Remember that fisherman's bend!" I shouted. Perhaps my voice was rather austere; but who would not forgive a wise virgin for saying, a little dryly, to one of the foolish, "Well, use

your spare can"? As soon as he sang out "All right," I took a good haul on what was now the working half of the rope, to test his knot-making. Yes, he *was* all right. So I bade him come up, and he started. Whenever he looked up I saw that he had a wild, gadding eye; and whenever he stopped to breathe during the struggle he gasped, "I can't see it yet."

He came nearly half-way, and then he did see it. He had just reached the worst part. Oh, the Sirens know when to start singing! That flower of evil was far out of his reach, or of what his reach ought to have been. Some twelve feet away on his right it was rooted in some infinitesimal pocket of blown soil, a mere dirty thumb-nailful of clay. For a moment the lover eyed the beloved across one huge slab of steep stone with no real foothold or handhold upon it—only a few efflorescent minutiae small as the bubukles and whelks and knobs on the nose of some fossil Bardolph. The whole wall of the gully just there was what any man who could climb would have written off as unclimbable. Passion, however, has her own standards, beyond the comprehension of the wise:

His eye but saw that light of love,
The only star it hailed above.

My lame Leander gave one whinny of desire. Then he left all and made for his Hero.

You know the way that a man, who has no idea how badly he bats, will sometimes go in and hit an unplayable bowler right out of the ground, simply because the batsman is too green to know that the bowler cannot be played. Perhaps that was the way. Or perhaps your sound climber, having his wits, may leave, at his boldest, a margin of safety, as engineers call it, so wide that a

madman may cut quite a lot off its edge without coming surely to grief. Or was it only a joke of the gods among themselves over their wine? Or can it be that the special arrangements known to be made for the safety of sailors, when in their cups, are extended at times to cover the case of collectors overcome by the strong waters of the acquisitive instinct? Goodness knows! Whatever the powers that helped him, this crippled man, who had never tried climbing before, went skating off to his right flank, across that impossible slant, on one foot and one stilt, making a fool of the science of mountaineering.

I vetoed, I imprecated, I grew Athanasian. All utterly useless. As soon could you whistle a dog back to heel when he fleets off on fire with some fresh amour. I could only brace myself, take a good hold of the rope in both hands, and be ready to play the wild salmon below as soon as he slipped and the line ran out tight. While I waited I saw, for the first time, another piquant detail of our case. Darwin, absorbed in his greed, had never untied the other end of the rope. So he was now tied on to both ends. The whole rope made a circle, a vicious circle. Our whole caravan was sewn on to the bony structure of Wales with two big stitches, one at each jammed stone.

You see how it would work. When Darwin should fall, as he must, and hang in the air from my hands, gravitation would swing him back into the centre of the chimney, straight below me, bashing him hard against the chimney's opposite wall. No doubt he would be stunned. I should never be able to hoist his dead weight through the air to my perch so I should have to lower him to the foot of the chimney. That would just use up the full 60 feet of rope. It would run the two 60-foot halves of the rope so tight that I should never be able to undo the bad central knot that confined me. Could I

but cut it when Darwin was lowered into provisional safety, and then climb down to see to him! No; I had lost my knife two days ago. I should be like a netted lion, with no mouse to bite through his cords: a Prometheus, bound to his rock.

But life spoils half her best crises. That wretch never slipped. He that by this time had no sort of right to his life came back as he went, treading on air, but now with that one bloom of the spiderwort in his mouth. Apologizing for slowness, and panting with haste, he writhed up the crack till his head appeared over the chockstone beside me. Then he gave one cry of joy, surged up over the stone, purring with pleasure, and charged the steep slope of slippery grass above the precipice we had scaled. "You never told me!" he cried; and then for the first time I noticed that up here the whole place was speckled with *Lloydia*. The next moment Darwin fell suddenly backward, as if Lloyd himself or some demon gardener of his had planted a very straight one on the chin of the onrushing trespasser in his pleasure. You guess? Yes. One of his two tethers, the one coming up from behind the lower jammed stone had run out; it had pulled him up short as he leapt upon the full fruition of his desire.

He was easy to field as he rolled down the grass. But his tug on the rope had worked it well into some crevice between the lower jammed stone and the wall of the crack. We were anchored now, good and fast, to that stone, more than three fathoms below. What to do now? Climb down and clear the jammed rope? Leave that lame voluptuary rioting upon a precipice's edge? Scarcely wise—would it have been? Puzzled and angry, I cast away shame. I knew well that as Spartan troops had to come back with their shields or upon them, or else have trouble with their mothers, a climber who leaves his tackle

behind in a retreat is likely to be a scorn and a hissing. Still, I cast away shame. Ours was no common case; no common ethics would meet it. I untied us both, and threw both ends of the rope down the chimney; then I let Darwin graze for a minute; then I drove him relentlessly up the steep grass to the top of the crag and round by the easy walking way down.

As we passed down the valley below, I looked up. The whole length of our chimney was visibly draped with the pendent double length of that honest Scot's mountaineer's rope. "I don't really know how to thank you enough," Darwin was babbling beside me, "for giving me such a day!"

But I felt as if I were one of the villains in plays who compromise women of virtue and rank by stealing their fans and leaving them lying about in the rooms of bad bachelors. Much might be said for climbing alone, no matter what the authorities thought. A good time it would be, all to myself, when I came back to salvage that rope.

ARNOLD PALMER

BROWN, OF EPSOM

I

"THANK you, Tom," said Mrs. Brown, passing from the dining-room.

Her husband, as was his custom, inclined his head until only his thick, white hair could be seen. It was a graceful movement, distinguished by that fine, old-fashioned courtesy which had enabled many incompetent paddock artists to make a fairly recognizable job of him. They were safe in sketching Tom, and editors were safe in publishing their sketches. It seemed as if the public could never have too many of them.

Old Tom Brown straightened himself, closed the door, and returned, a wonderfully youthful figure, to his chair. Even his red, clean-shaven handsome face might have belonged to a man of fifty. Only his restless, delicate hands betrayed his age. He was seventy-four; the oldest and most famous of all English trainers. And, in some ways, the most respected.

"You can't help respecting a man," folk would say, "who has forgotten more than most people know."

However, in the course of his long life he had, as a matter of fact, forgotten very little. It was the public who forgot, and forgave, annually at Lincoln or the



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ARNOLD PALMER



Craven meeting, as soon as the familiar figure was seen, hat in hand, at the entrance of the unsaddling enclosure.

He always took off his hat to his winners; and, at the sight, even those who had lost their money, or at least not too much of it, would smile grudgingly and shake their heads.

"Wonderful old boy. I mean to say, dammit, he does look the part, eh? Not like—well, some of these modern highwaymen," they would conclude rather lamely, with a scared glance to right and left.

And occasional visitors to the race-course, if once they had been nudged and shown Tom Brown, went away examining their views on the Turf. They had seen Tradition in the flesh; they had felt something stir within them as at the portrait of an ancestor. They didn't hold with racing, and never would. It was a national vice. But a picturesque vice, like port drinking in the eighteenth century. A bit of the real England. If you had any feeling for history, you were bound to allow yourself a sort of smile.

Picturesque! Old Tom was always that; at exercise in the early morning, in his square bowler hat, double-breasted blue-tail coat, and trousers strapped beneath half Wellingtons; on the course, in brown bowler, white stock, cloth gaiters and covert coat; most picturesque of all, perhaps, as now, with his large black satin bow, frilled, billowy shirt, and watered silk waistcoat of black, in the evening. The light of candles, rose shaded, fell on the thoughtful master of February, on the cut-glass decanter before him, on the replicas of cups on the mantelshelf, and picked up the gold frames of pictures lost in shadow on the walls. That little rectangle, barely visible in the darkest corner of all, above the sideboard, was a painting of February; a bad horse, but he had won the Great

Metropolitan just as the house had been acquired, and it had been renamed February House after him. Most of the other pictures were Tom's classic winners—Fine Frenzy, Eight of Clubs, Poet, Codlin, Lady of Shallot, Ribston and The Blues. That was Poet, his one Derby winner, over the mantelpiece. He was generally considered below the average of Derby winners, but old Tom knew better. A delicate horse and most difficult to train, he had never been more than two-thirds fit at any stage of his career, never within 10 lbs. of his potential form. An ugly chap, until he was asked to gallop, a great, ungainly, angular black, with white face and stockings; the wrong colour, everybody said, and anyhow the wrong shape for Epsom. Tom smiled. They were still telling him his business to-day, as they told it him then, thirty years ago. Thirty years. . . . By God!

Fine Frenzy and Eight of Clubs came even earlier. They had won the Two Thousand in successive seasons, and had fairly put him on his feet. Now, sleek and wasp-like, they shared the same well-tended lawn on the same canvas. Codlin hung over the door, a little brown plug of a horse, tough as walnut. He had never actually won a classic race, but he was second in all three of them, and as a four-year-old he had run away with the Ascot Gold Cup. The chestnut beside the door was Lady of Shallot, a daughter of Poet. She had won the Oaks and ought to have won the St. Leger. But that was left for Windowsill, a bay horse by Cyllene out of Windowbox. Windowsill came at the beginning, The Blues at the end of Brown's fourth decade as trainer. Nearly forty years had passed since he last won the Guineas, in Eight of Clubs' year; but, though he was pleased to win it again, he never cared for The Blues as he did for the earlier horse. He was one of those damned, new-fangled greys,

splashed with pink, and Tom hated 'em all. Even now, when the doctors had told him he must give up at the end of the season, and he realized that The Blues was the last classic winner that would ever walk away in the lemon February rug, he couldn't bring himself to like the horse. He had purposely hung him where he should never be tempted to look at him, next to his little beauty, his little idol, Eschalote.

He walked to her picture and, holding out a candle above the level of his head, gazed at the bay mare. There she was, the best and unluckiest animal he ever trained. She had never won anything in particular. Nobody but himself would remember her now, if she hadn't bred Lady of Shallot. He moved across to the daughter. A nice mare, a bay, too, and nearly as game as her dam. Tommy Loates, in the Fowey terra-cotta jacket, sat on her back, his hands dropped on her withers, his head turned towards the artist. None of the others was painted with a jockey, but an exception had been made in this case, because poor Tommy always rode her and thought the world of her.

"Good boy!" crooned the old man. "Good l'il gal!"

He replaced the candlestick and, contrary to custom, poured out a second glass of port. An exceptional event; but then, an exceptional day.

An unusually trying day. He had been greatly upset by a paragraph in one of the papers. All his life they had annoyed him. The sporting papers were bad enough, with their daily reports of training. Why couldn't they content themselves with racing results and, of course, prices? Still, he was used to seeing his string of horses being observed at exercise on the Downs, and he knew plenty of ways of dodging the observers when it was advisable to do so, and at other times turning them to

good account. But the Press had gone far beyond training reports. Every paper nowadays, even *The Times*, gave selections for the day. That meant more men nosing round, and even saying in print that such and such a one of his horses might win, when anyone could see, from a glance at the book, that it had lost its form. Then there were other papers appearing just after breakfast with a full list of runners and jockeys for every race and a betting forecast, all to appease the infernal curiosity of people who never meant to go near the course. What was it to do with the public when he ran his horses, whom he had engaged to ride them, and the price they were expected to start at?

Nothing! The old man pushed away his glass so roughly that some of the port was spilled on the mahogany. He dabbed at the puddle with his napkin. Nothing! The whole thing was an unwarrantable attempt to interfere with a gentleman's right to do what he liked with his horses. He was sorry for owners—or more strictly, he was sorry that the papers wouldn't leave owners alone. It ought to be enough for a trainer to say, in effect, to a gentleman, "You leave it to me. Our interests are one"; and a gentleman, if he was a gentleman, would see it. But now, with one paper telling an owner he ought to do this, and another paper telling him he ought to do that, a trainer had to be able to argue like a lawyer. Not that he could complain. In the past he had had his share of troublesome owners, like other men. In particular there had been an Anglo-Indian, a grasping, suspicious man whom he never recalled without a frown. But he had learned from experience and experiment, and for the last ten years he had collected and kept a little bunch of seven or eight owners, and things had worked very well. They were all of them gentlemen who liked a bet, without be-

ing great gamblers, and he had persuaded them to leave it all to old Tom. And why not?

He saved them trouble, and saw that they were all treated alike. He had his own commission agent, Larry O'Donnell. Larry, after working for several stables and being discarded by them all in turn owing to his garrulity, had suffered a long eclipse before being engaged by Tom Brown. Plenty of people put in a bad word for Larry. There never had been, there never would be, any lack of feather-heads anxious to teach the trainer his business. Tom thanked them, and wondered why it occurred to none of them that he had taken Larry on account of, not in spite of, his failing. He had known and observed Larry in the past, and he found, as he expected to find, that Larry's discretion was complete until some five minutes before the start of a race. Then his Irish blood, which began to simmer at the sight of a horse, could stand the excitement no more, and boiled over. He would do anything in the world for old Tom, but if February House was meaning business he couldn't for the life of him help nodding and winking and showing off his knowledge, once the horses had gone down to the start. Old Tom didn't want him to help it. After Larry, acting on his instructions, had put on a hundred or a hundred and fifty for each of his owners, perhaps a thousand pounds in all, and the horse's price had shortened, for instance, from 100 to 7 to 100 to 14, a few winks and nudges from Larry to professional backers might result in 6 and even 5 to 1 being the best offer by the time the flag fell. Then, although the price obtained by Larry had averaged 10 to 1, the owners would be satisfied if they received eights, three points over starting price. And old Tom—hat in hand, wonderfully picturesque on the steps of the weighing-room, and respectfully murmuring,

"Thank you, my lord!" and "Thank you, sir, I hope you backed it"—had won a couple of thousand without risking a penny.

Oh yes, he liked his winners to start at a short price. He made no secret of it. As he often said, it showed that the public had followed the stable lead, and shared in its success. The public knew this; and although it had little use for favourites, preferring to seek longer odds for its shillings and half-crowns, it always cheered his winners under the vague impression that a "popular" victory was a win for its side.

Of course, Larry had to have his present from time to time. Why not? What objection could there be to little things like that, which left everybody satisfied? None. Only, of course, one didn't talk of them. They were nobody else's business. Old racing men understood perfectly just what questions they might and might not ask. But there was a new generation now, a lot of jabbering monkeys. They were the people who read the midday editions and the sporting articles—read them and wrote them. The readers were inquisitive; and the journalists, naturally inquisitive too, used them as an excuse to be more nose-y than ever. Nothing was sacred that might afford a sensation, not even a trainer's plans or his relations with his owners. They distorted the simplest action, they calumniated men with long honourable records—and all this, if you please, in the name of purifying the Turf.

And the youngest and the newest and the worst of them all, who made a point of sneering at Tom, whether his horses won or lost, was Number Cloth; a conceited cub who knew nothing about racing, wrote for a paper which had nothing to do with racing, and filled a whole page of it every Sunday when there was no excuse for

any racing news at all. Number Cloth! The very name reminded him of the dirty handkerchiefs he had to spread nowadays beneath his saddles, adding a chance of eczema to the other risks already prevalent in travelling boxes and strange stables. If people wanted to come racing, they ought to learn to recognize the horses. Besides, there were the colours as an aid to watching the start; but modern sportsmen couldn't even remember them! Tom sucked his teeth. He expected to find himself ordered to wear a label, next.

II

He drank off his port, that rare second glass which had been induced by the mischievous effort of Number Cloth. A fortnight earlier, on his way to Doncaster, a mutual friend, hoping for some amusement, had introduced Tom to a young man named Cook, who was travelling in the same carriage. Tom had bowed in his best Regency style. The young man nodded. The mutual friend, looking on with shining eyes, continued after a moment.

"Mr. Cook," he said, "is almost as well known to the public as yourself, Tom."

Tom hesitated. He looked puzzled, faintly startled; like the horses he understood so well, he had the gift of scenting danger. He waited, conveying somehow in the lift of his head that his ears were pricked.

The humorist waited too. He knew Tom Brown's views on the Press, and he meant to have some fun.

"Mr. Cook," he went on at last, "is your favourite author, Number Cloth."

"Ah!" Tom Brown's eyelids fluttered. Then he regarded the journalist steadily.

"So you are that young man," he began in his softest

voice. "Our friend here is pleased to be facetious. I do not read your paper more often than I can help."

"I'm——"

"Still, I have read enough to know that you take advantage of your position to damage honourable men, to make untrue suggestions about them."

"I do nothing——"

"You cannot damage me. But either through ignorance or spite you try to."

The old man's voice shook.

"Believe——"

"Had I known who you were, I should not have been introduced. But since I have been tricked into making your acquaintance, I will ask you this."

"Ask away!"

"You think of yourself as a sportsman. Then why aren't you man enough to say definitely that I am dishonest, that I tell jockeys not to win, that I run horses that are unfit? When I was your age, we had a short way with men like you, spitting lies from behind a hedge. They either came out in the open, or we went after 'em and rolled 'em in the ditch." Tom Brown's voice had risen, his ruddy face grew purple as he hurled his final words across the carriage.

"Why don't you tell us what you're getting at? Why don't you come out into the open?"

There was a taut silence. The whole compartment, taken unawares, seemed to be holding its breath. Mr. Cook, who had recovered his composure, stared insolently back. "Why," he declared, with mock surprise, "that's just the complaint I'm always making about you!"

Tom hardly heard the roar of laughter, though he remembered it later. The veins stood out in his forehead and neck. He seemed on the verge of explosion, when

convulsively he tore open *The Times* and held it before him for the rest of the journey.

A few hours later, his Lady of Shallot colt started favourite, at 9 to 4, for the Champagne Stakes, and was beaten a neck. Old Tom, tired, sore and, worst of all, commiserated with, had a feeling that, but for that accursed scene in the train, this would never have happened; somehow he became convinced of it, when one of his fellow passengers of the morning pointed out that the winner was Number Cloth's selection. Even that was not the worst. The whole affair, in which the loss of the race was only one move, began to obsess him. He thought of himself as the representative of his generation, chosen to repulse, in the person of Cook, the horde of newcomers. This was the failure that tormented him; and ever since, for a long fortnight, the ghosts of the great figures of his day—Sir Joseph Hawley, Admiral Rous, Sir John Astley, the Duchess of Montrose, John Osborne, Fred Archer, Captain Machell, and a crowded background of others—had followed him with reproachful eyes. Some idea of defending them, of defending his belongings, was at the back of his mind when with such eagerness and severity he admonished Number Cloth in the railway carriage. Against a young man who knew nothing, who was worth nothing, he had sprung to champion their cause. He had merely brought them to ridicule. He had been laughed at, he and the great past.

The memory of his wounds brought a snarl to his lips. They were still open, those wounds; and he had no intention of letting them heal for the present.

And now the afternoon post had brought him a letter from the least tractable of his owners, and the principal one, Lord Fowey.

55 PORTMAN SQUARE, W.

September 29th, 192—.

BROWN,—I enclose a cutting, not the first paragraph of its kind which I have observed in this paper. I do not care for my horses to be made the subject of semi-humorous, semi-malicious references in the Press, and I shall be glad, therefore, if you will make up your mind as soon as possible as to the best course to be pursued with regard to Ladies' Man's engagements and, after laying your suggestions before me, take steps to see that there is no longer any mystery as to the colt's objective.

Please do not read into my remarks any reflection upon yourself. I consider the paragraph scurrilous and uncalled for. That is why I am anxious for it to be unique.

I hope you and Mrs. Brown are well.

Your obdt. servt.,

FOWEY.

The piece of paper enclosed had evidently been torn from a column of notes. His lordship omitted to give the name of the newspaper. But part of the heading, *Straw Chaff*, was visible, from which Tom Brown knew not only that the column was Number Cloth's, but that the offensive paragraph had been placed first. It ran as follows:

For many of us, racing will lose half its charm when Tom Brown retires at the end of this season. Besides being the oldest of our trainers, and the most striking in appearance, he is admittedly the most versatile. This means that not merely has he trained winners under both rules, but that he has at one time and another shown that he has no superior in any branch of his profession, from the training of a Derby candidate to the profitable exploitation of bad horses. There is still, however, one quality which the master of February has not shown us. Why should he not put the

crown on his versatility by proving that he can resist the temptation to mystify the public? Supposing that, just for once, as a parting gift, he told us whether Ladies' Man was going for the Cambridgeshire or the Liverpool Autumn Cup or both. . . .

.

Half the charm of racing lies in its uncertainty.

.

He drew the scrap from his pocket, unfolded it, and with tight lips read it through once more. He took no interest in the art of writing, and the point of the detached sentence still escaped him. Lord Fowey, he thought, had torn the sheet carelessly. But he understood that the main paragraph, after rubbing its nose against him, suddenly laid back its ears and bit. Just where the change occurred he couldn't say. Very smart, very sneery! No doubt he'd had a splendid education and knew a lot of things Tom Brown didn't know. But there were one or two things the old man knew, for all that. He knew the difference between minding your own business and poking your nose into other people's affairs; between keeping your mouth shut and letting a lot of fools step in and reap the benefit of your work; between a certainty and a fair to medium chance. On these points he'd back his knowledge against the whole House of Peers.

And there was something else, too, he remembered and could tell his timid lordship. Number Cloth, for all his fine talk, was not disinterested. When the Earl of Rafferton died and the Rafferton horses were put up for sale, a four-year-old called Organgrinder had been sold for next to nothing to a man of the name of Cook. Tom remembered, if Lord Fowey did not, that Organgrinder,

the year before last, had been reputed a two-year-old of high class. He had run three times; once, unbacked and unplaced, once backed a little but still unplaced, and finally starting at a very short price, only to fail again. Then his legs gave out, and he had not been seen on a race-course since. There were too many good 'uns in that stable. But his new owner had sent him to a small and patient trainer, and the horse had been entered for the Cambridgeshire and handicapped at seven stone one. Tom had made a mental note of him when the weights were published. It had been a wet summer, just the year for a horse with doubtful legs, he reflected.

And now Mr. Open-and-above-board Cook wanted to sting other people into helping him reckon up Organ-grinder's chances!

Tom sat in his chair, putting two and two together. He used no books of reference to verify his facts and figures; they were all in his head, pinned down by his wonderful memory.

Versatile!

The ghost of a smile passed over his lips. He thrust back his chair, stood up, and glanced round the solid, heavy, spotless room. Not bad, for a man who couldn't write a column of notes for a newspaper, and had started with no advantages! On the walls, Tommy Loates and the nine champions of February House seemed to draw themselves up and salute him in the gloom. Good horses, good horses! Trained by T. Brown, Epsom.

"What a time you've been!" remarked his wife. "I thought you were never coming."

He turned away his head, as if, after the dark of the dining-room, the bright light hurt his eyes.

"I had another glass of port."

Mrs. Brown looked at him without ceasing to knit.

"Feel bad, Tom?"

"No."

Reluctantly her attention returned to her needles. "Fancy! Well, I dare say it will do you no harm. Once in a way, you know."

"I dare say."

It was nine o'clock, half an hour before Tom's bedtime. He opened the card-table and set out a game of Patience.

"There now!" exclaimed his wife, "to think of me forgetting! Warners rang up while you was round stables."

"Ah?"

"They're asking two thousand five hundred for that house."

"Are they?"

"I don't call it dear."

"I call it a lot of money."

"But you've got it."

He continued dealing the cards. "Oh, yes, I've got it," he admitted. "But I can't afford to get it out. It means a loss."

"Oh, well," she answered, unmoved, "you'll have to win a nice race."

Tom smiled. "You talk as if turning out winners was easy as turning on taps."

"There's two bathrooms, you know," remarked Mrs. Brown.

"The season's nearly over. Only six weeks more. And races want a bit of winning in the autumn."

Mrs. Brown poked her stomach violently, as though in momentary discomfort. "It's your last six weeks. You surely haven't saddled your last winner?" Her husband was engrossed in his game. "I expect you'll manage it all right, Tom. It wouldn't be like you, not to."

Her husband placed the ten of Clubs on the knave of Hearts. "It looks as if I shall have to try," he admitted.

Mrs. Brown knitted away with her usual imperturbability. People, especially before a big race, often wondered how much she knew. It was generally agreed that she was her husband's one confidant; and, this being so, that her profound ignorance of the intentions of the February House stable, and indeed all racing gossip, was ludicrously overdone.

III

Two days later, Lord Fowey received his trainer by appointment. Although far from a young man, he was the third holder of the title to patronize February House. Tom grumbled at going to London, but in his heart he enjoyed his visits to Portman Square. The old house had hardly changed at all, and the survival of the butler, with whom he had been acquainted for more than a quarter of a century, strengthened the feeling of continuity.

"Ah, Mr. Brown!"

"Good morning, Mr. Ramsden. Keeping well, I hope?"

"I can't complain, Mr. Brown, I can't complain. You're looking wonderful."

"Pretty fair. His lordship in?"

"And expecting you, Mr. Brown. I shall be in the hall when you go, if you care to come to my room and have a chat."

"Thank you, Mr. Ramsden."

Tom, seated on the edge of a chair, explained at some length the connection between Number Cloth, Organ-grinder and the objectionable paragraph. Lord Fowey listened patiently, but failed to show a proper spirit.

Evidently it was the publication of the note, even more than its iniquity, that troubled him.

Tom, changing his tactics, recommended prudence and asked for time.

"If we scratch the horse at Liverpool, he may be stopped in his work and not be ready for the Cambridgeshire. And it would be a pity to scratch the horse at Newmarket, because I don't know yet for sure that he will get the extra two furlongs at Liverpool."

The owner was a just, painstaking man. Unfortunately, he never could be sure whether people were serious or not, and he had worried himself by dwelling on the way he had been chaffed at the Carlton Club by noble readers of Number Cloth.

He hesitated. Tom wondered whether it would be safe to suggest that the horse should be trained for Liverpool, but left in the Cambridgeshire in case it were necessary for his preparation to include a race in public. He decided to say nothing. His lordship took alarm so very easily.

The harassed peer stared at a sheet of notepaper lying on the blotter.

"We've got four pounds more to carry at Liverpool," he observed.

"So have most of the horses entered in both races. That's about the usual difference in weights, my lord. The Cambridgeshire form is rather higher, you see."

Lord Fowey felt irritated and helpless. It had seemed so easy to tell his trainer that there must be no mystery about his plans. But Brown had no settled plans; he had nothing, except a plausible objection to every proposal.

The conversation went on, though it seemed to the owner to be going round and round. Finally it was agreed that Tom should ascertain as soon as possible whether the

horse could stay a mile and three furlongs. If he did, he was to run at Liverpool; but if the trainer was not satisfied as to his stamina, he was to go for the Newmarket race. The horrible topic of "scratching" was not mentioned again.

"But," said Lord Fowey in conclusion, "returning to what you said just now, if the Liverpool Cup will be the easier race to win, I must remind you that a win is always welcome. My predecessors raced for the love of racing, and so do I. But whereas in former years I might have said, 'Try for the Cambridgeshire,' that being the more historic race; now my instructions are that Ladies' Man runs for the race he has the best chance of winning." He rose and placed his hand on the bell. "Times have changed, Brown, times have changed. A bird in the hand, you know— Don't forget the old proverb."

Tom smiled. His lordship might forget that trainers also like to win, especially when their opportunities of doing so were almost past. But when had he ever forgotten anything? Even while the claims of the Autumn Cup were being pressed so delicately, he was remembering his patron's bourgeois weakness for trophies.

He bowed to Lord Fowey and Lord Fowey bent his thin neck to Brown. Both were satisfied that they had, for the moment, gained their object. Neither was entirely happy about the future.

Mr. Ramsden led the way to his room at the end of the corridor.

"Not for me, Mr. Ramsden."

The butler paused, decanter in hand.

"Oh, surely! It's the old brown, Mr. Brown."

"I know it is. But I have to obey the doctor's orders now, Mr. Ramsden."

He would not be tempted, and his host, refusing to drink alone, replaced the sherry in the cupboard. The two old friends talked of the past for half an hour, and were puzzled to find that although they remembered the horses that ran second and third to Eight of Clubs, they could not recall the name of the animal that so nearly beat The Blues.

When it was time for the trainer to go, Mr. Ramsden looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, Mr. Brown?"

For the first time in his life he saw Tom embarrassed by the familiar question.

"Suppose you leave it to me, Mr. Ramsden, and let me include you in the stable commission."

"Oh, Mr. Brown!"

"And as it's for the last time, you might double your stake, eh? A pound, just this once. It will be something good, I promise you, or not at all."

"Certainly Mr. Brown. Though, of course you can trust me not to give away your plans for Ladies' Man."

The butler, while highly gratified at the idea of sharing in the stable investments, felt that he owed it to his dignity to enter this slight protest. Trust had always been reposed in him hitherto, and never seriously abused. He was a member of the household, and at least as solid for the family as any of its outside dependants.

Tom wagged his forefinger playfully.

"Ah, Mr. Ramsden, you're like the rest of the public. You will have your bet on these big races. Why? Terribly open! Terribly risky!"

The amateur blushed. "I suppose it's the love of sport, you know," he said apologetically.

"Oh, sport!" Tom grinned. "I was talking about betting."

"Oh! Then you aren't thinking about Ladies' Man? You've got another winner?"

The butler's eyes sparkled.

"The best bets," replied his friend, "are on a second-class horse in a third-class race. You leave it to me to do my best for you."

Mr. Ramsden, who had opened the door, closed it again. "I couldn't be in better hands," he said earnestly. He drew out a pound note.

"No, no, no. That's unlucky. Put it away. I hope I shall never have to ask you for it."

Tom walked thoughtfully to the Marble Arch, where the buses stop on their way to Victoria. Several people turned to look after him, and went on their errands smiling at awakened memories of Jorrocks or Squire Western.

IV

He had a good deal to think about. His first action, after his return, was to write to Larry O'Donnell begging him to come down to Epsom for luncheon on the following day. Larry was only too eager to comply. But at first the old man's conversation did not follow the usual lines.

"I see Organgrinder is quoted at 16 to 1 for the Cambridgeshire."

"That's so. The same price as your horse."

"Do you know anything about Organgrinder?"

"Not much," admitted Larry, "beyond the fact that he was supposed to be a good two-year-old, and that so far his legs have stood the preparation. Possibly the stable has backed him for a little, and if he goes on all right, and faces the starter, I understand he'll nearly win the race. But the 'if' 's a big one. His trainer ain't much."

Tom smiled. "Stick to figures, Larry. That's the side of racing you understand best."

"But——"

"Never mind, never mind! Now do you know the owner? Cook?"

"Only by sight," said Larry, rather sulkily. "He's Number Cloth."

"Ah?" said Tom unenthusiastically.

"The man who thinks trainers and owners an' jockeys an' horses should take the public to their bosom and tell 'em what's going to win, so's they can spoil the market!"

Larry's face expressed the greatest contempt. But Tom, usually so hostile to journalists, only smiled tolerantly.

"Perhaps," he remarked, "he'll think differently, now he's an owner. But he hasn't told us much about his horse, has he? I rather wonder some of your newspaper friends haven't pulled his leg."

Larry seemed greatly cheered by Tom's innocent suggestion. He slapped his thigh, delighted at his own quickness.

"That's a fine idea ye've given me, Mr. Brown! I'll get old Corkscrew to put a little bit in *The Judge's Box* about it. The paper goes to press to-morrow; so there will be time, if I ring him up to-night."

But the old man's interest, never very strong, had evaporated. "I was only joking," he explained. "Still, I suppose it wouldn't do any harm, and we might hear some news about Organgrinder. He's bound to be dangerous, if he runs. And one can't know too much. The difficulty is to know enough about a race like the Cambridgeshire. Anything might win it."

He paused, but Larry said nothing. The conversation looked at last like becoming serious, and he knew his companion too well to hurry him,

"Who's been backing my horse?" demanded Tom at length.

"Nobody," replied Larry. He was familiar with that question. "There's no real money for anything yet. Ladies' Man is at sixteens because the layers don't like to open out against him. You can't blame 'em. After all, he did win the Lincolnshire."

"Eighteen months ago!"

"Don't I know it! But, ye see, he hasn't run much since. Oh, I know, I know! There's been no rain for eighteen months. Still, don't worry. As soon as a few horses are backed by the right people, yours will go to twenties."

"Twenties!"

"Well, if you wait long enough, and the touts don't get busy with you, you might get twenty-five."

Tom rose. "I wouldn't take fifties," he declared. He turned his frankest, most benevolent and open-air look on Larry. "Owners like to win, you know, and I've an idea the horse stays fairly well. When you get back to town, my boy, see what sort of price they'll lay you about Liverpool. Quiet, you know. Don't startle 'em. Just put him up with one or two more."

"I will that, Mr. Brown."

Larry was all smiles now. He saw clearly into the mind of the February House trainer; he knew, though he would not reveal, what all the racing world would like to know; he was happy.

Larry wrote that night to say that he had not wasted his time on reaching town. Sixteen to one could be had about Ladies' Man for either of his races, but so weak was the market that even a roundabout inquiry for Liverpool prices had made the horse slightly easier for the

race at Newmarket. He thought he could have obtained eighteen, if he had wanted to bet. And he had seen old Corkscrew.

Tom read the letter through again before tearing it up. He did not know many journalists, but he knew Corkscrew. Who didn't? He was an institution rather than a journalist, a familiar figure in Fleet Street and Tattersalls' for forty years or more. He had stood at Tattenham Corner when Blair Athol, making his first appearance on a racecourse, won the Derby; and he could remember James Snowden taking up his whip at that point and giving his inexperienced mount a side-binder. Even Tom couldn't remember that, never having seen a Derby before the momentous race of 1867, won by a horse called Hermit. Still, they were contemporaries, and if Tom looked like a hunting squire, Corkscrew resembled a tragedian of the old school. A hard nut (as Tom knew) for all his artistic get-up; a man famous for his women and his wit, who had ordered his life on the principle that all was fair in love and war. There would not be a great deal of love lost between him and a new broom like Number Cloth. . . .

Tom did not buy a copy of *The Judge's Box* and never saw what Corkscrew said. But he evidently said something. When Sunday came Tom read Number Cloth's page with great care. Most of it was devoted to *résumé*—rather hurt in tone—of the writer's record as an implacable foe to every form of selfishness in sport, and to a full statement of his hopes and fears for Organ-grinder. Readers were assured that the stable had not yet backed the horse, and would not do so until the public had been fully apprised of its intentions on the following Sunday.

The master of February had gained another week at least. There was not a word at which Lord Fowey could take offence.

v

The Cambridgeshire is a race of nine furlongs, the Liverpool Autumn Cup of eleven. Students of reports from the training centres gathered that Ladies' Man was being worked over distances ranging from seven furlongs to a mile and a half. This told them nothing. But whispers began to reach them. Towards the end of the week, Lord Fowey received a letter from his trainer respectfully informing him that the horse appeared to last out his longer gallops, and promised to have a good chance at Liverpool. At the same time, he was urged to leave the horse's name in both engagements, in case any change of plans became necessary.

Tom awaited the answer with much anxiety. But Lord Fowey showed himself perfectly satisfied. Although he did not mention the fact in his reply, he had gone straight to the Carlton Club and sought out as many members of the Jockey Club and other racing men as he could find. Most of them had forgotten all about Number Cloth's article, and wondered why Fowey should hand them his trainer's confidential letter to read. They even glanced suspiciously at his face. Its earnestness made them feel ashamed of themselves. They returned the sheet with many thanks; and the owner of Ladies' Man, his self-esteem restored by the heartiness of their voices, missed the faint undercurrent of surprise.

First-hand information of a stable's plans is always acceptable, even when of a negative character. Lord Fowey's acquaintances reflected, like Tom Brown, that one could never know too much; and those of them who

did not go so far as to back Ladies' Man for the Liverpool Autumn Cup were ready with the deduction that the February House connections were scared of at least one of the Cambridgeshire horses.

One or many; but in this case rumour indicated one, and they were content to look no further. The most obscure citizen knows that at any moment the roving eye of the Press may single him out and hoist him up into a headline. Mr. Cook's horse, hitherto scarcely even a name to the public, was ignorant of this, and was spared the embarrassment, though not the notoriety. Daily, with great regularity, it filled a larger space in the newspapers and in the life of the country. Number Cloth's article, which was intended to remove all possible misconceptions about the animal, succeeded in enveloping it in a cloud of lies. As already stated, his remarks had been chiefly in defence of his honour and frankness; but, believing attack to be the best method of defence, he had not hesitated to criticize the man who had impugned them. He had compared his Victorian antagonist to the diplomatists of the old school and all who preferred darkness to light. Several people, of whom Corkscrew was one, fancied that a resemblance to Bismarck or the Kaiser had been suggested. *The Judge's Box* was nothing if not patriotic. Corkscrew followed up his paragraph with a column and two-thirds entitled, "A Number Cloth over our Eyes." After contrasting the mistaken fidelity of Bismarck with the calculating treachery of Iscariot, he asked his readers what they were to think of a man who, in his dual capacity of journalist and owner, betrayed the public with an inky kiss by advising them to refrain from backing his horse, in order that he and his friends might have the market to themselves for a week. Corkscrew admitted that he did not know definitely that Mr. Cook had yet backed his

horse. But he challenged Mr. Cook to deny that his friends had done so. The writer concluded with a moving passage on the beauties of friendship and an urgent recommendation to those who fancied the horse to make their investments without delay.

Readers of *The Judge's Box*, less numerous than Mr. Cook's but far more speculative, did not know that one more domestic crisis was fretting Corkscrew's temper and making him prone to hastiness. By Saturday Organ-grinder stood at 8 to 1 wanted, 15 to 2 being the best offer obtainable. Number Cloth, cursing hourly the contract which precluded him from appearing in print more than one day in the week, was in difficulties. A gentleman whose horses were trained in the same stable as his own had, as a matter of fact, already backed Organ-grinder for a small sum. Number Cloth might, and did, disapprove of his action; but mere disapproval satisfied neither him nor his readers. He yearned to hurl Corkscrew's words back into his teeth. That was no longer possible, save qualifications, and he loathed qualifications. As he had often told his followers in the past, he chose his *nom de plume* because it was his ideal that his writings, and everything else in connection with the sport, should be as clear and indisputable as a black figure on a white background.

Nor was this all. He had been looking forward to fulfilling his promise of the previous Sunday, and to announcing the horse's well-being and every detail of the tests to which it had been submitted, concluding, for the benefit of a faithful but bamboozled public, with a recommendation to back a horse of whose chances of success he made no secret. But on the Friday morning Organ-grinder, from some cause not yet explained, galloped very badly. On the Saturday he went better, but still not as

well as he had gone on Thursday. Number Cloth would have liked to set out the facts in simple language, leaving his readers free to form their own opinions. But the horse remained firm in the market, and his owner saw that his attempts to tell the bare truth would enable Corkscrew to place all kinds of misconstruction on his words.

Under the circumstances, he produced a rambling and rather incoherent article.

On the Tuesday a morning paper of enormous circulation devoted a column of its outside sheet to "The Organgrinder Mystery," while an evening paper issued from the same building placarded its distributing vans with "Organgrinder?" Number Cloth, to whom mystery was as a red flag to a bull, sat in a racing special bound for Newcastle. His duties compelled him to be at the Newcastle meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday; at Doncaster Thursday and Friday; and on Saturday at Stockton. His trainer, who lived in Berkshire, had no horses running in the North. The Cambridgeshire was a week to-day. He wondered what he should say in his final advices next Sunday, and how he was to satisfy himself as to Organgrinder's condition. He wondered what new line of attack would be opened by Corkscrew on Thursday.

He stared gloomily out of the window, unable to bear the amused glances of his fellow-journalists. His position gradually became clearer, though not more comfortable. There were two points to be decided, and the decisions were not difficult. First, should Organgrinder run or not? Obviously, he must run if he could stand up. Too often had Number Cloth denounced the scratching of favourites. Mr. Cook had no choice. Secondly, was Number Cloth to make him his selection for the race? He could hardly leave him out. He knew that the horse had a fair chance; he remembered all the races he had

seen, and the danger of saying that any horse definitely would not win. If he advised his readers to back some horse other than Organgrinder, and Organgrinder won, what would people say? No, no, His horse must start, and must carry his printed blessing. Organgrinder each way. Not very attractive at 8 to 1, in a field of five-and-twenty horses. But he was not responsible for the false price. Anticipatory bets by one of the big backers, following Corkscrew's column, were to blame.

Number Cloth swallowed. He realized that circumstances were forcing him to persuade the multitude to invest its half-crowns on a horse whose quoted price hopelessly over-estimated its chance of success. He was tempted to wish he had never bought the horse. But he put the thought away as unworthy of a sportsman. Only by owning horses could he practise what he preached.

VI

Mr. Cook's was not the only horse to cause his trainer anxiety during the week. Ladies' Man knocked himself and was restricted to light work for a day or two. Tom Brown paid a hurried visit to Portman Square, and found his patron finishing a solitary luncheon.

"The injury is nothing, my lord," he reported. "It's the delay that matters. I can see him being still short of a gallop when he goes to Liverpool."

Lord Fowey tapped the table. "Can't you fit in an extra one?" he asked, with mingled diffidence and impatience.

"It don't do to hurry a horse beyond a certain point. Nature's slow," explained the old man, imperturbably. He had had years of experience of owners, years and years; and their most ingenuous suggestions no longer even tempted him to smile.

"I see. Well, you must do your best. It's disappointing, very disappointing. After what you told me I hoped—but there! I've always been an unlucky owner."

They both glanced involuntarily at the sideboard. Tom saw nothing to grumble at in the array of cups.

He cleared his throat. "I was going to say, my lord, that we could overcome the difficulty——"

"How?"

"If you'd let him go for the Cambridgeshire. A race in public's worth half a dozen gallops."

His lordship frowned. "I don't like training my horses on the race-course," he declared.

Tom grasped his hat and stood up, sturdy and glowing. "I've been in the service of your family, my lord, over half my life. Ever since you were a schoolboy. There's never been a word against the terra-cotta jacket or Tom Brown. Why, look at the prices of your lordship's winners! Miserable! But that's the Fowey tradition. When your lordship wins, his friends win, the public wins. I'm an old man, my lord. My work's nearly done. I'm not a-going to undo it to win any race in the world. I've won enough."

Lord Fowey raised his hand. "You misunderstand me, Brown. I'm not unmindful of the traditions of my house, or of your services. All I meant was that I don't wish any horse of mine to run unfit."

Tom was not the first to find the peer deficient in the finer shades of tact.

"There won't be a better-looking horse in the field. I shan't disgrace you, my lord; no, nor myself either. He'll win if he can. And if you'll excuse me, my lord, after what's been said I hope that in fairness to me you'll make a special point of giving the jockey his orders, as usual."

"My dear Brown, that is hardly necessary. I mean, I have no desire to make a special point of it."

"I'd rather you did."

There was a short, silent battle of wills.

"Very well, Brown, if you wish it. But be assured that I have implicit confidence in you."

"I'm glad to hear it, my lord."

They bowed stiffly, and the trainer withdrew. He was so moved that he stamped past Mr. Ramsden without a word, and hurried down the steps. In the butler's long recollection such a thing had never happened before. He had half a mind to run after him, and he glanced over his shoulder to see if one of the footmen, prowling round the dark hall, was observing him. He longed to know further details of his pound. It was so dull having a bet on an unnamed horse at an unspecified meeting.

But besides the danger that his lordship, who did not like his servants to bet, might see him from the dining-room window, the angry ring of Tom's ferrule on the pavement warned him not to yield to curiosity. After a moment's irresolution he closed the heavy door.

VII

The jockeys were mounting for the second race when Tom, in the oldest fly he could find in Newmarket High Street, reached the course. He stopped at the entrance to the paddock and bought a card from an aged woman huddled in a shawl.

"You're late, Mr. Brown."

"I'm not running anything till the big race, Kate."

She peered up at him with bright eyes.

"Twenty to one, Mr. Brown, twenty to one. It's a good price."

"Too good to be true, eh?" he laughed.

"Ah!" nodded the old creature.

Tom moved on, paused, and half unwillingly returned. Old Kate was his generation, like Corkscrew; and he thought of all the years he had known her. He would never come to Newmarket again as a trainer. But she, poor old soul, couldn't afford to give up.

There was nobody about.

"I tell you what, Kate. I'll stand you twenty shillings to nothing."

A man came round the corner of the wall.

"Thank you, sir," called Kate, as Tom hurried away. Then she turned to the new-comer. "*Star or News?* Thank you, sir. Organgrinder for the big race. You back Organgrinder, Captain."

Tom was already regretting his sentimentality, when it occurred to him that Kate would certainly misconstrue his offer. She would be sure to think that his horse had no chance. Nobody paid much attention to her tips, of course. Still, he preferred to believe that he had taken one more precaution.

Pink, black, yellow, green, scarlet and blue caps were bobbing beyond the top of the palisade, and spectators were streaming out to the stands. Tom opened his card, and placed a tick against the horses shown on the number board. The Houghton Handicap, seven furlongs. Ba-Ta-Clan looked to have as good a chance as anything, but he didn't know how they were betting. He walked about, greeted one or two acquaintances among the stablemen, and put his head in at the boxes. Several of the Cambridgeshire horses were already there. Ladies' Man might be expected at any moment. He lifted his head and listened. Faint, distant shouting had caught his ear. The noise was swelling to a roar, louder and louder as the horses drew nearer. Then a mass of brilliant colours

swept past the railings, and he had a glimpse of the jockeys standing up in their stirrups, pulling up their mounts and turning their heads to right and left to note the disposition of the field. On they swept, hidden now by the palisade, up the slope to the high road, and simultaneously men came running into the paddock at every gateway. There was a faint rattle from the board, and a little frame was run up with the numbers 15—4—14.

"Fifteen," muttered Tom, fumbling with his card. Curse his fingers! They always trembled nowadays. "Ba-Ta-Clan!"

Odd, how relieved he felt, how much younger! It didn't matter to him what won the race, but the victory of Ba-Ta-Clan restored his confidence in himself. He was ready now.

Ready for Larry, who had seen him from afar and was rushing towards him with a white face.

"Oh, Mr. Brown, but ye're late! It's too bad the way I've been lookin' for ye everywhere."

Tom could see that Larry was almost crying. "I hope you backed Ba-Ta-Clan," he said teasingly.

"Oh, damn Ba-Ta-Clan! It's the big race, Mr. Brown. Is it nothing at all ye're doing? Organgrinder's 13 to 2, and pretty tight at that. There's people backing it as if the race was over, and ye saw the Sunday article with the account of the wonderful trial and all?"

"What else is being backed?"

"A hundred to twelve Let Ball and Tobacconist. Kohl at nines. The others pretty much the same as last night. Ladies' Man twenty-five."

"Who's backed it?"

"No one to speak of. Just a lot of odd pounds and fivers from people who like a long price. It's a light market, ye see, money being so scarce."

"I see. Well, we're just looking on to-day, Larry. It sounds a good thing for Organgrinder."

"It does that," said Larry sadly. He saw Lord Fowey and other gentlemen approaching, and he made his way slowly back to the ring. He knew nothing that any intelligent student of the betting had not already grasped long ago.

The paddock was filling rapidly. Tom Brown, his hat ceremoniously raised at the approach of his chief patron, brought a smile of reminiscence to the lips of all the men and exclamations of rapture from the ladies.

"Your horse is coming in at the gate now, my lord."

"There's Ladies' Man," Lord Fowey told his friends, and pointed with his stick to a brown horse in lemon-coloured rugs.

A bell rang, five jockeys in smart overcoats came hurrying from the dressing room; a select band, the best riders in the country. Five good two-year-olds were contesting the Moulton Stakes, and after they had pranced out on to the Heath people ebbed in channels from the paddock, like water from a lifted tarpaulin. Even for the sake of a comfortable inspection of the Cambridgeshire horses, few were willing to miss this race, and the little group consisting of Lord Fowey, his friends and his trainer, was left alone, leaning on the wooden rail.

"Is Organgrinder among this lot, Jock?" asked Fowey.

A tall, youngish man with a fair moustache answered, "Over there, in the claret blanket. The grey."

Tom looked across the ring. He had never seen the animal. He could not see much now, beneath the clothing, but enough was visible to show him that the horse was one of the splashed roans to which he had such an antipathy. The old man's eyes glistened. It only wanted that! It was more than he had dared to hope for.

The crowd surged back again, larger than ever. Lord Fowey's party, joined by several of the other patrons of the stable, made its way to the horse-box, and presently Ladies' Man was led in, stripped of his rugs, and saddled.

There was a minute's critical silence.

"Your horse looks pretty fit, Harry," said the gentleman who had recognized Organgrinder.

Tom saw his employer blush, and came to the rescue just in time.

"I should say so," he remarked shortly. "There's nothing wrong with the horse."

"I only meant——" replied the other, and stopped, fearing to make matters worse.

"You were thinking of Liverpool," suggested Lord Fowey.

"Yes."

Tom eyed the young man with disfavour. He needed a lesson in manners, like the rest of them. "His lordship don't want him knocked about to-day if he can't win, because he can win at Liverpool. That's all, sir. But he'll win to-day, if he's good enough."

"Naturally," added the owner.

"Naturally," replied his friend, a trifle dryly. He bent down, as if to examine the horse's legs, but really to hide a smile. Tom's last words told him all he wanted to know. They were one of the Turf's traditional jokes. When Tom said one of his horses would win, if good enough, somehow it never was good enough.

The trainer walked round the horse, and nodded.

"Come on, Old Whiskers!" cried the stable lad. "By your leave, please, by your leave!"

The horse responded, obedient but dignified, and followed by Lord Fowey and the rest passed down a lane of spectators into the second ring.

The men walked to the middle of the oval enclosure, already half full of trainers and owners. Ladies' Man took his place in the chain of horses circling round and round.

The owner's brother-in-law, a short, stout man, slipped an arm through Jock's and led him aside.

"Not quite the usual February polish, eh?" he murmured.

"His coat's breaking," Jock replied. He was staring at the horse with a puzzled frown. "That doesn't mean anything."

"No, no, of course not," replied the other.

He saw the jockey approaching and returned to Fowey's side.

"Well, Allen," said his lordship, affably and in a loud voice. "You've ridden for me often enough. You know my instructions never vary. Do your best, but don't punish the horse if you see your chance is hopeless."

Allen touched his cap. "Just so, my lord. I won't give him a hard race for nothing."

"Oh, ride him out, ride him out," said Lord Fowey. "I won't have my horses eased. He understands that, Brown?"

"He ought to, my lord," answered Tom.

Allen took off his coat, and was hoisted up into the saddle. He was not one of the fashionable jockeys. But he was a capable horseman, and a quiet, respectable young man. He kept his own counsel, and Tom approved of him. Tom walked beside him till he was out of earshot of the others.

"Now, Joe," he said. "You remember the Lincoln?" The jockey grinned. "Just the same to-day, just the same."

"Good!" said Joe.

Lord Fowey was already making his way towards the stand.

"I wish you had a stronger jockey," remarked his brother-in-law, trotting beside him.

"Brown couldn't make up his mind whether it was wise to run the horse or not," explained the owner. "So, of course, leaving it so late, he had to get whom he could. I've told him to try and engage Donoghue for Liverpool."

"Ah, that will be a stronger combination!" the other replied, winking at Jock.

But Jock gazed down at him stonily. "This combination was good enough to win the Lincolnshire," he said.

"Oh, yes, of course. I've nothing against Allen, mind you. Only——"

Meanwhile, Tom was slowly climbing the steep staircase to the trainers' gallery.

"Here's old Tom!" announced somebody, and several trainers called out. "Hullo, Tommy!" without removing their glasses from their eyes.

"Your horse has gone down, Tom," they told him.

"How did he look?" asked the old man.

"A dream. Will he win it?"

"He'll win if he's good enough," came the familiar answer, and was greeted with the usual shout of laughter.

"What about Liverpool?" cried a diminutive man at the end of the front row.

But at this moment the white flag was hoisted, and the trainers grew quiet, save for an incoherent muttering. Fifty yards away the voices of the bookmakers strained and cracked in one last effort to attain an unreachable fortissimo. They were not even heard by the majority of those who stood not the length of a cricket pitch away. They had no time to glance at the white speck in the distance on which all eyes and attentions were fixed. An age

passed; half a minute or ten minutes. Men lowered their glasses to rest their arms, and to rest their thoughts talked of irrelevant matters. Suddenly the flag dipped. Several thousand voices, as though in obedience to a conductor's baton, in perfect unity ejaculated, "They're off!" In the peculiarly solid silence which followed, every man could hear his neighbour breathe. Then a line of coloured caps, stretched right across the course, bobbed, rose, swelled into men; and the excited murmurs began again as the horses charged into view.

They were still a mile away, and difficult to distinguish. But presently Tom heard a trainer say, "The favourite's all right in the middle."

"What's fa-avourite? Organgrinder?" asked a North-country voice from the back.

"Ay," mimicked the first speaker, and was rewarded with a few nervous laughs.

"Tobacconist's goin' well on the far rails. What's that in green racing with him?"

"Organgrinder's won it there," boomed deep tones.

"Oh, 'as 'e?" snapped the little man in the corner, his face hidden by his hands and field-glasses. "What's wrong with my 'oss? What's wrong with Rouge Pot? She's goin' well enough, ain't she? Why shouldn't she win it?"

Nobody paid any attention. Someone heaved an enormous sigh, as if he would have blown the oppressive roof off. A mutter, "Organgrinder's won it," and immediately another, beseechingly, peevishly, "Oh, what the hell's that in green?"

Everybody was talking now, expecting neither listeners nor answers. The favourite's jockey was seen to move uneasily, and a dozen voices proclaimed, "Organgrinder's beat!"

There followed another infinitesimal pause while they took stock of the new situation. The trainer of Rouge Pot was heard swearing softly to himself in the corner.

Then, "Look at this side!" screamed a high-pitched voice. "Look at that thing in red on the near rail! What the—— Gosh! It's old Tom! Tom, you old——"

His voice was lost in the general cackling and shouting. "Ladies' Man walks it! You've done it, Tom! You've done it on us, Tom! Tom's won it!"

The field flashed by and disappeared behind the stand. Two horses that had whisked round at the start cantered leisurely up the middle of the course, their riders sympathetically exchanging grievances. The crowds on the far side relieved its feelings with ironic shouts and laughter. There had been little cheering. An easy victor at 25 to 1 is never acclaimed, and although, at that price, Ladies' Man probably carried more of the public's shillings and half-crowns than any of the February "popular" winners, he passed the post amid a cold and disapproving silence.

"Well done, Tom!" The trainers shut their glasses and returned them to their cases. "Well—why, where is the old man?"

But Tom Brown had slipped out, and was already hobbling down the staircase at the back. He hurried across the worn turf to the unsaddling enclosure. His face wore its habitual bluff expression, but his fingers fumbled again as he paused to open his card. He glanced at the number board. Number ten, J. Allen. Yes, yes, but the others? Number thirty-four . . . Poppæa! Number twelve, Tobacconist!

The old man gave a little sigh, and his mouth shut in a hard, satisfied line. He took up his position on the steps, and replied politely to the congratulations which were

now being offered him. But his glance constantly strayed over the heads of the crowd.

"What was the fourth?" he asked suddenly.

"Organgrinder, I think."

"Ah!"

He could see in the distance the terra-cotta jacket just now coming in at the gate, but he seemed to take more interest in a dismounted jockey in blue and white who, his saddle on his arm, was talking earnestly to a pale young man. As they passed him, the young man looked up, as if in response to his stare.

"Congratulations!" he said. He tried to smile, but the result was not a success, and he passed on without offering his hand.

Tom looked after him. "Thank you, Mr. Cook," he replied gravely.

Lord Fowey was close behind him, receiving felicitations with a pleased but slightly suspicious air. The trainer had forgotten all about Lord Fowey; and, as he had not been seen, he removed his hat and turned to meet Ladies' Man.

There was some clapping as the horse and his smiling rider were led in. But a raucous voice, bawling, "Good old Tommy!" reminded people that they were assisting at the farewell appearance of a greater celebrity than Ladies' Man.

They gave Tom Brown, bareheaded, hale, hearty, a chip of the Old England of coaching days and cock-fighting and a pint of ale for breakfast, they gave him an ovation.

"By God," said a man beside O'Donnell, wagging his head. "A wonderful old boy. Makes you sort of proud, eh?"

"Blast him!" muttered Larry, scowling.

VIII

"And there's another thing," said Mrs. Brown, sliding the wool along her needle. "I suppose I can tell Warner in the morning that you'll buy that house?"

Her husband hesitated. He mistrusted explanations. They only led to more questions. And, after all, he liked the house, and could hardly expect to find anything cheaper.

"I say," repeated Mrs. Brown, "I suppose I can——"

"I heard. Yes. That'll be all right."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic. It's no good pretending now that you can't afford it."

The old man considered this statement for a long time, as if hoping to find some flaw in its truth. "No," he admitted ultimately.

He looked longingly at the card-table. He felt very tired, and in the mood for a game of Patience. But there were several letters to be written before he could go to bed. He went into his little room, and sat down at his desk beneath the coloured print showing the Flying Dutchman beating Voltigeur at York in 1851. There had been a previous meeting at Doncaster, the year before, when Voltigeur won owing, it was always said, to the Dutchman's jockey, Marlow, being drunk. It might be true. That was before Tom's day. But form was often wrong at Doncaster. Take the Champagne Stakes, for instance. Lady of Shallot, colt—ah, well! . . . That was Nat Flatman on Voltigeur. Marlow and Nat, good luck to 'em wherever they were!

Letters, yes! Rather difficult letters. That was the worst of training for several owners. It meant the devil of a lot of writing and explaining. Everlasting explanations. . . . Nothing in the world would make them be-

lieve he hadn't backed Ladies' Man. Very difficult letters. All except one; that was easy, and seemed by contrast almost a pleasure. He unlocked the top right-hand drawer, extracted his cheque-book, and made out a draft for five-and twenty pounds, payable to Mr. Ramsden.

OSBERT SITWELL

THE GREETING

FROM outside the long, large windows fires could be seen flickering in many wide grates, while the comforting sense, more than smell, of warm food oozed out of the whole house, subduing the sharper scent of frosty air. The dining-room table, she noticed as she passed by, was laid for three persons, and decorated with four small silver vases, from which a few very rigid flowers drew themselves up into the light of the windows. The side-board showed beyond, bearing various drab meats and some pieces of plate, its cold glitter tempered by the flames with patches of warm orange.

As soon as Nurse Gooch was shown into the drawing-room, almost, indeed, before she had shaken hands or remarked how nice it was to see a fire, they went in to luncheon. But seated before this white expanse, these three people could not succeed in materializing any conversation, that, as talk should, drawing its strength from the group but stronger than any individual member of it, would continue almost automatically, reproducing itself or taking on a fresh form from time to time. In the same way in which spiritualists claim that the presence of one sceptic at a séance is sufficient to prevent any manifestation, however hoped for and credited by the majority, here



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OSBERT SITWELL

it was difficult for the talk to glow or prosper, when one of this small party was continually exerting her will to the utmost in order to produce a lasting and uncomfortable silence. The stagnant quiet of the room was seldom broken, then, except by the rather horse-like stepping of the footmen, or by the thin, stringy voice of the invalid projected through the mute air in querulous inquiry. And, in the very act of speaking herself, both by the purpose and calculated tone of her question, she enforced a silence on the others. Colonel Tonge tried to make conversation to the new-comer, placed between him and his sick wife, but his abrupt, pompous little sentences soon withered, frozen on the air by his wife's disapproval. Mrs. Tonge, however, as we have said, permitted herself to ask a question occasionally—a question which, though it appeared innocent, was designed to convey to her new nurse the impression that she was an injured, ill-used woman. “When, Humphrey,” she would ask, “do you intend to put electric light into the house? I have asked you to do it for so many years now. I am sure I should sleep better, and should not be such a worry to you or to nurse,” or “What about that summer-house, Humphrey? Will it be ready for me in the spring? If I am still with you, I intend going there every day when the weather is warmer. Perhaps I shall find a little peace there in the woods. But I fear it hasn't been touched yet.” To these questions the Colonel returned smooth, soothing answers, but ones which did not commit him in any way; but these, rather than conciliating the invalid, seemed only to vex her the more. But at this early period, before she understood her nurse, before she knew that anything she said would soon be pardoned, she did not actually as yet accuse her husband of doing all in his power to make and to keep her ill, but was content to let this accusation remain

implicated in her questions, and in the sound of her voice. Still, Nurse Gooch felt instinctively that Mrs. Tonge did not want to hurt her, that she was not in reality ill-natured, but that this calculated putting-out of the social fire was the outcome of a thousand little injuries inflicted by an imagination warped by constant illness and want of sleep. But whether it was due to the atmosphere created by this friction between husband and wife, or to something in the surroundings—in the house itself—she did most certainly, at this first moment of her arrival, experience an uneasy feeling, a slight repulsion from the Grove, which passed as soon as she became better acquainted with it.

Tonge's Grove, a square house, lies like a box thrown down among hanging woods and open commons—a charming residence in many ways. Like a doll's house it seems, each room giving the correct proportion to the rather under-life-size figures it displays. A curiously inappropriate setting, certainly, for any drama, the protagonists of which must find themselves cramped in their action by the wealth of detail imposed. The very comfort and well-being of the place would give a grotesque air to any but an accustomed or trivial event. For here, long habit appears so much more important than the occasion or fact it originally enshrined, inanimate objects so much more actual, more active, than human beings, that it is upon the house, and not upon its owners, that our attention is first focused. It is this superfluity of things, combined with a rigorous pruning of reality, that gives a certain significance to any fact of life should it be strong enough to enter these gates, yet remain quick. For reality, which is usually unpleasant, seldom touches lives such as these except at birth, of which, fortunately, we are all ignorant, or at death, a latent, lurking fear (an

ogre at the end of every passage), but one which it is our very human convention to ignore.

The Grove is not really a small house; the rooms in it are large and numerous; but, like a square toy thrown in among garden beds and stables, crinoline-shaped lime-trees and red-walled angular orchards, among, in fact, all the long-settled paraphernalia annexed to a prosperous, well-ordered way-of-life, it was endowed with a perfection such as at first to make it seem miniature, like some exquisite model seen through a glass-case.

Certainly there is beauty about an estate of this kind: that tamed country sentiment, so English in quality, clings to it, till even the bird-song that trickles down through the dripping blue shadows thrown by tall trees seems arranged, punctual, and correct as the mechanical chirping of one of those clock-work birds that lifts enamelled wings out of a square black box; and even the cuckoo, who makes so ominous a sound from the cool green fortifications of wood or hedgerow, here changes his note till it rings hollow and pure as a church bell. No sense of mystery broods in the green and open spaces bathed in yellow summer sunlight; here are no caves, grottoes, or tumbling torrents: everything is neat, shallow as the clear, slightly-running streams that border the wood; yet surely such beauty is, in a way, more fantastic than any of Leonardo's piled-up rocks or those world of ogres and giants to which we are carried off by some of the primitive painters.

In the winter it is, that all these country places are seen in their best, their most typical phase. Stout, built for cold weather, these houses take on a new quality, up-standing among hoar-frost, glowing warmly through the crisp, grey air. The first impression of the Grove would be, we think, a childlike memory of potting-shed smells,

full of the scents of hidden growth; an odour of bulbs, stoves, rich fibrous mould, and bass, mingles with the sharp aromatic smell of the bonfire that crackles outside. On the walls of the shed the bass is hung up like so many beards of old men—ritual beards, like those of Pharaoh or Egyptian priest, which, perhaps the gardener will don for the great occasions of his year. This one he put on for the opening of the first spring flower, coming up glazed and shrill, its petals folded as if in prayer, out of the cold brown earth, beneath the laced shadows woven by the bare branches of the trees; this he will wear for the brazen trumpet-like blowing of the tulip-tree; while that one he reserves for the virginal unfolding of the magnolia, or the gathering up of petals let drop by the last rose.

But the gardener himself soon dispels these tender imaginings, as you see his burly form bent over various cruel tasks—the trapping of the soft mole, or in aiming at the fawn-coloured fluffy arcs of the rabbits, as they crouch in their green cradles, their ears well back, nibbling the tender white shoots that he has so carefully nurtured.

Outside the shed in many glass frames large violets, ranging in tone from a deep purple through magenta to an almost brick-red, their petals scintillating damply, glisten like crystallized fruit seen through a glass window, sweet but unapproachable. The ground of the kitchen garden is hard and shiny, starched with frost; trees, shrubs, and the very grass are stiff and brittle, sweeping down under the slight wind with a shrill, steely sound. But the orchard walls still glow as if stained with the juice of the ripe fruits that press against them in summer and autumn, red, purple, and bloomy, while the house beyond shows warmly through the trees whose topmost twigs pattern themselves about it, like cobwebs

against the sky; soft it is, as if cut from red velvet. Out of its doors and windows sounds the monotonous, dry-throated rattle of pet dogs, setting up a comfortable yet irritating competition with the noises of stable and farm-yard, where rosy-faced men bustle about, lumbering in heavy boots; or, leaning to one side, the right arm lifted and at an angle, blow loudly and whistle, as they polish still more the varnished horses, their breathing lingering on after them in the sharp air like dragon's-breath. Through the windows of the house each fireplace shows up, while the red flowers blaze in it, or die down to a yellow flicker, fighting ineffectually against the thin silver rapiers of the winter sun. But more than all these things would you notice here the bitter cackle of a green parrot, falling through the drawn-out air with a horrid clatter tumbling all lesser sounds down like a pack of cards. Certainly that menacing silly sound of a parrot's laughter would be your most abiding memory.

On such a noon as this it was that Nurse Gooch had first driven up to the Grove; so that, even if her first impression was a rather uneasy one, she had at any rate seen it wearing its most pleasant, most comfortable, aspect; for at night the character of every house changes—and this one alters more than most. The smiling comfort of the surroundings is lost, fades out into utter blackness, and a curious sub-flavour, unnoticed in the day, manifests itself. There are places and moments when the assumptions, the lean conventions on which our lives are based, become transparent, while, for an instant, the world we have made rocks with them. It is, for example, usually assumed that there are no such creatures as sea-serpents, yet there are certain places in Europe, on our own placid coasts even, of such marvellous formation that we feel, suddenly, that the existence of these monsters is a certain-

ty—that it would surprise us less to see a vast beast, such as those painted by Piero di Cosimo, with flame-forked tongue, gigantic head, and long writhing body, coming up out of the fathomless green depths, than to see a passing country cart, a clergyman, or anything to which our experience has accustomed us. There are moments, too, when death, which, as we have said, it is usually our custom to hide away in a dusty corner of our minds, peeps round at us, grimacing—and we realize it as one of the universal and most awful conditions upon which we are permitted to take up life. So it was with the Grove, when darkness confined it round. The dwarf perfection, which we have attempted to describe, would gradually disappear; for the very dimensions of the house seemed to alter as the rooms became swollen with darkness, full of inexplicable sound. Dead people walk here with more certain step than the living, their existence seems more substantial, their breathing more audible. The boarding of the floor yields under an invisible step, as if some strange memory stirs in it, and the panelling of the walls, the very furniture, make themselves heard with a hard, wooden creaking, which is magnified in these rooms now grown to the new proportions with which night endows them. And, in the darkness outside, everything moves, stirs, rustles.

It was therefore not to be wondered at that the Grove should have acquired the reputation of being haunted, though, really, the unhappy restless air that pervaded it at night may have been due more to its long association with a family of sad, unfortunate temperment—amounting in certain cases to something worse—than to the actual walking presence of any ghost. For ever since the present house was built, late in the seventeenth century, it had been in the possession of the Tonges and, until recently,

until in fact the present owner had inherited the estate, there had been a long history connected with it of brooding melancholy, that must have been nearly allied to madness.

But Colonel Tonge, as we have seen, presented an ordinary enough character, with nerves unaffected, betraying no sign of hereditary disorder. Among the properties we have described—house, lawn, garden, farm, and stables—this not altogether unattractive figure emerges, strutting like a bantam. A proud little man, with a fairly distinguished military career, fond of hunting and shooting, he was much engaged in the business of an estate, the extent and importance of which he was apt to magnify in his own mind. In addition to these interests, he was involved in the affairs of every district committee, and, as became him in his dual capacity of squire and military man, was much to the fore in all those local philanthropic schemes which had for their object the welfare of the ex-soldier, or the helping of widow and children.

Yet in spite of this inherited make-up of country gentleman and the acquired one of soldier, there was about the Colonel on closer acquaintance some quality that removed him ever so little from the usual specimen of his class, just as there was something about the Grove that differentiated it from the run of English country houses. In what, then, did this difference consist? Partly, perhaps, in the stress that he laid upon the importance of his belongings, and therefore of himself; but more, surely, in the extraordinary calm that marked his demeanour—a quiet unruffled calm, not quite in accord with his bristling appearance and apparent character. One never saw him lose his temper, never even about trivialities, such as is the way of most military commanders; yet this restraint did

not seem to arise so much from good nature as from the fear of losing his self-control even for a moment—suggesting that he was suppressing some instinct or emotion which must be very strong within him, if it was necessary continually to exert such an iron self-discipline. This contrast between nature and manner showed itself, too, in the difference between his uneasy, wandering eyes and the tightly drawn mouth. But if Nurse Gooch had, with more than her normal sensitiveness, felt at first that there was a rather queer atmosphere about the house, she had at any rate detected nothing unusual in the look or manner of this amiable, rather pompous, little man, and, indeed, the only person who appreciated thoroughly these various subtle distinctions was Mrs. Tonge. This poor lady had married her first cousin, and appeared to have inherited or acquired his, as well as her own, share of the peculiarly nervous temperament of this family. Thin, tall, and of that ash-grey colour which betokens constant sleeplessness, her rather sweet expression, while it was in direct contradiction to her restless, irritable soul, was the only remnant of a former prettiness. For, when first she married, she had been a good-looking, high-spirited girl, but had suddenly, swiftly, sunk into this state of perpetual and somewhat nagging melancholy. She was in reality a stupid woman, but her frayed nerves bestowed upon her an understanding of, and insight into, the unpleasant side of life that were alarming in the sureness of their judgment, and must have made of her a trying companion. She added to these heightened preceptions a sense of grievance, aggravated by an absolute lack of any interest or occupations, and by the fact that she was childless. She complained constantly, her chief lament being that there were only three creatures in the world that cared for her, two dogs—a Pomeranian and a Pekinese—and her

beloved green parrot! Often she would add a remark to the effect that her husband would like—was, in fact, only waiting for—Polly to die. His triumph would then, apparently, be complete. And it must truthfully be said that the only thing which ever seemed to disturb the Colonel's calm was the idiot-laughter which the parrot would let fall through the darkened air of the sick woman's room. But though the slightest noise at any other time would strain Mrs. Tonge's taut nerves almost to breaking-point, she appeared actually to enjoy her bird's head-splitting mirth; while the parrot, in return, seemed to acknowledge some bond of affection between his mistress and himself, for, were she more than usually ill, he would be ever so quiet, not venturing to exercise his marked mimetic gifts, even repressing his habitual laughter.

This love for her parrot and her dogs, together with a certain trust in, more than affection for, her young nurse—a trust which developed as the months passed—were all the assets of which Mrs. Tonge was conscious in this life. For the rest she was lonely and frightened . . . very frightened. Her whole existence was spent in a continual state of fear—one of the worst symptoms, though quite a common one, of neurasthenia; she was afraid of her neighbours, her husband, her house, terrified by everything and everybody alike. But, while frightened of everything, she was consistently opposed to any plan for the alleviation of these imagined terrors.

Afraid, though seemingly without reason, of her husband, she was yet never able to refrain from making the fullest use of any opportunity to irritate, hurt, or annoy him. But he was very patient with her. She would taunt him with things big and little; she would attack him about his self-importance, or goad him before the nurse about his fondness for giving good advice to others, in a man-

ner that must have made him feel the sting of truth. She would even accuse him of wishing to be rid of her—a poor invalid and one who was in his way—an accusation which, however, she could never really have believed for a moment. She would tell him that he had a cruel soul, and in her sick mind seemed to have fashioned a grotesque, caricatured little image of her husband, which, to her, had at last come to be the reality—an image, unlike yet in a way recognizable, of a queer, patient, cruel, rather wolf-like creature, hiding his true self beneath the usual qualities attached to the various very ordinary interests and pursuits in which his life was spent.

In spite of this extraordinary conception of him, Mrs. Tonge was always calling for her husband. Her plaintive voice echoing through the square, lofty rooms would be answered by his gruff, military tones so often that one of the parrot's most ingenious tricks was a perfect rendering of, "Humphrey, come here a minute!" and the answering call, "Yes, Mary, I'm coming," followed by the sound of hurrying footsteps. Thus, though frightened of him, though almost hating him, the invalid would hardly allow her husband to leave her, if only for a day.

Still more was Mrs. Tonge frightened of her house—that home which she knew so intimately. But, in the same perverse manner, she would never quit it, even for a night. While suffering terribly from insomnia, and from that fear of darkness which, though it usually leaves us when our childhood is past, had never wholly left her, she was steadfast in her refusal to allow Nurse Gooch to sleep in the same room, thus lessening these nocturnal terrors by human companionship. On the contrary, the sick woman not only insisted on being alone, but was resolute in locking both the doors of her room, one of which led into her husband's bedroom, the other into the

passage outside, so that had she been seized with sudden illness, which was not altogether unlikely, no help could have reached her. Thus, bolted securely within those four walls, she would indulge her broken spirit in an orgy of sleepless terror. The dogs slept downstairs: her only companion was Polly, noiseless now, but faithful as ever, sitting hunched up on his perch, his dome-like cage enveloped in a pall of grey felt; and, even had he sounded his bitter, head-splitting laughter, it would have seemed sweeter than the music of any southern nightingales to the poor invalid, tossing about on her bed. For the parrot, alone of the animal-world, could give his mistress some feeling of momentary security.

Day would come at last, to bring with it an hour or two of grey, unrefreshing sleep. The afternoon she would spend knitting, seated in a large armchair in front of the fire, in her overheated boudoir crowded with strong-smelling flowers. Photographs of friends—friends whom she had not seen for years and had perhaps never really cared for—littered all the furniture, and clambered up the walls, over the fireplace, in an endless formation, imbuing the room with that peculiar, morbid tone of old photographs, yellow and glazed as death itself. Bustles, bonnets, then straw hats and leg-of-mutton sleeves, showed grotesquely in these little squares of faded, polished cardboard, set off by a palm-tree in an art-pot, a balustraded terrace, a mountainous, yet flat background, or one of those other queer properties of the old photographic world. The wistful smiles on these pretty faces were now gone like her own, the smoothness of the skin was now replaced by hundreds of ever so small wrinkles, the fruit of care, sorrow, or some seed of ill-nature or bad temper that, undreamt of then, had now blossomed. The rest of open space on table, piano, or writing-desk

was taken up by diminutive unconnected vases of violets, freesias or jonquils, their heavy breath weighing on the air like a cloud, seeming among these photographs so many floral tributes to dead friendship, each one marking the grave of some pretended or genuine affection. The room was overloaded with these vases; the flowers lent no grace to the room, no sweetness to the overburdened air. The Pomeranian yapped at Mrs. Tonge's feet, the Pekinese lay curled up in a basket, while at her elbow the parrot picked at a large, white grape, the stale odour of the bird's cage mingling with the already stifling atmosphere of the room, till it became almost intolerable. Here the invalid would sit for hours enjoying one of the thousand little grievances from which she was able to choose, turning it over and pecking at it like the parrot at his grape; or, perhaps, she would be gripped by one of the manifold terrors of her life. Then that supreme horror, the fear of death (which, as she grew older, claimed an ever-greater part of her attention), grimaced at her from the scented shadows, till it seemed to her as if she sat there knitting endlessly her own shroud, and the vases of flowers transformed their shapes, rearranging themselves till they became wreaths and crosses, and the hot smell they exhaled became the very odour of death. Then she would ring again, calling for Nurse Gooch, but even that familiar footfall would make her shudder for an instant.

Her only pleasures now consisted in the tormenting of her even-tempered husband, or, in a lesser degree, of the poor young nurse—to whom she had now become attached in the same sense that a dog is attached to any object, such as a doll or an india-rubber ball, which it can worry. But Gooch, good and amiable, clean-looking rather than pretty, her face fully expressing that patience and kind-

ness which were her two great qualities, won the affections not only of the invalid but of Colonel Tonge, and even of the servants—this latter no mean conquest when it is remembered that there is a traditional feud between servants and trained nurse, almost rivalling that other hereditary vendetta between nursery and schoolroom. Nurse Gooch was really fond of her patient, in spite of the maddening irritation of her ways: nor had she been unhappy during these eighteen months that had followed her luncheon at the Grove on that first winter day. For after the hardships of her own childhood, she appreciated this solid, very comfortable home, while it presented to her a full scope for the exercise of those protective instincts which were particularly deep-rooted in her nature. Often, in a way, she envied Mrs. Tonge her kind husband and charming house, thinking how happy the invalid might have been had only her disposition been a different one. For in Colonel Tonge the young nurse could see nothing but consideration for his ill wife, and kindness indeed to everyone, till, slowly, she formed in her own mind an image of him very different from that fashioned by his wife. To Nurse Gooch he was a model of suffering chivalry; to her his stature and heart seemed great, his importance equal to his own estimate of it. In fact, he became that very appealing combination—one which always fascinates the English people—a hero in public, a martyr in private life. And it was a source of great comfort for her to reflect that by keeping Mrs. Tonge in as good a mood as possible, or, to borrow a military phrase, by intentionally drawing the fire on to herself, she was able to some small extent to alleviate the trials of the husband. Then she could feel, too, in some mysterious manner, that he was grateful for it, that he began to take a pleasure in her society, in the knowledge that she under-

stood his difficulties, applauded his moderation. Often they used to sit together consulting with Dr. Maynard, a clever doctor, but one who lacked courage, and was in the habit of giving way to his patients. Gradually, therefore, if any new symptom showed itself, if any new problem arose regarding the invalid, it was with the nurse and not with the doctor that Colonel Tonge would first come to talk it over.

Existence at the Grove, though each day appeared to her encompassed in the span of an hour, so that she was continually finding herself landed, as if by some magic carpet of the fourth dimension, at the corresponding time of the next day, yet seemed eternal; even the state of the sick woman, though her nerves became ever more affected, appeared to be stationary. Outside there was the fat, placid life of the countryside to be watched, the punctual revolution of the seasons. First came the ice-green glitter of the snowdrops, frosting the grass of the park with their crystal constellations; then these faded, withered, turned yellow, deepened to the butter-colour of the daffodils that ousted them, flowers swaying their large heads under the spring winds, transparent, full of the very colour of the sun; and, almost before you had time to observe it, they would flush to a deep purple, would be transformed into anemones, the centre of their dusky blossoms powdered with pollen, black like charcoal dust, or would adopt that velvet softness of texture which distinguishes the rose from other flowers: and summer would be in its full flame. Then, inside the Grove, you found good food, punctual hours, a calm routine broken only by the outbursts of Mrs. Tonge, or by the bitter cackle of the parrot, its feathers green with the depth of a tropical forest, its eyes wary and knowing. It looked cunning, as if in possession of some queer secret—some

secret such as that of the parrot encountered in Mexico by the traveller Humboldt—a bird which alone in all the world possessed a tongue of its own, since it spoke a language now extinct. For the tribe who spoke it had been killed to a man in the course of America becoming a Christian continent, while the bird had lived on for a century.

The summer was a particularly hot one, and as it burnt to its climax, Mrs. Tonge's irritable nerves inflicted an increasing punishment on those around her. The Colonel, who was drawn away on various long-promised visits to old friends and taken to London several times on the business of his estate, left the Grove more than usual this July, so that the full brunt of any trouble in the house fell upon Nurse Gooch, who would often have to shut herself up in her room, and, strong-minded, well-trained woman though she was, cry like a hurt child, so intolerable was the strain imposed upon her by the invalid. The latter soon realized when she had made the tactical error of being too disagreeable—or, perhaps, one should say of concentrating a day's temper in one short hour, instead of spreading it thinly, evenly, over the whole of the sun's passage, so that, looked back upon, it should tinge the day with some unpleasant colour in the minds of her companions or servants. And being possessed of a certain charm or a false kindness, which she could exert whenever it was necessary to her, she was soon able again to engage the nurse's pity and affection.

"Poor thing," Gooch would think to herself. "One can't blame her for it. Look how she suffers." But however true was this reflection, it was the sick woman who was still the chief opponent of any plan for the mitigation of her sufferings. Though her sleeplessness became worse, though the prospect of those long, dark hours

threw a shadow blacker than the night itself over each day, yet she still refused to allow Nurse Gooch to rest in the room with her ; while Dr. Maynard, who should have insisted on it, was, as usual, completely overborne by his patient.

It is difficult to describe, though, how much Mrs. Tonge suffered, locked in her room during those sultry nights, for their darkness appeared to cover a period easily surpassing the length of any winter night. As she lay there, her limbs twitching, memories dormant in her mind for forty years would rise up to torment her. Her parents, her old nurse (all dead how many summers past!) would return to her here in the silence. All the disappointments of her life would revive their former aching. Once more she would see the gas-lit ball-rooms in which she had danced as a girl, and the faces of men she had forgotten half a lifetime ago. Then, again, she would see her wedding. All these memories would link up, and coalesce in feverish waking dreams of but a moment's duration, but which would yet seem to hold all eternity in their contorted perspectives. Wide awake now, she would recall her longing for children, or ponder upon one of her thousand little grievances, which took on new and greater dimensions in these hours. Here she was . . . with a parrot as her only friend . . . in this everlasting blackness. The thought of death would return to her, death that was at the end of each turning, making every life into a blind hopeless cul-de-sac. Long and hard she would fight this spectre of finality, against which no religion had the power to fortify her spirit. Then, after midnight, new terrors began, as the Grove woke up to its strange nocturnal life. Footsteps would sound outside, treading stealthily, stealthily on the black, hollow air ; the furniture in the room, cumbersome old cupboards and

chests of drawers, would suddenly tattoo a series of little but very definite hard sounds upon the silence, as if rapping out some unknown code. But when everything was swathed in quiet once more, this new absence of noise would be worse, more frightening than were the sounds themselves. It would smother everything with its blackness; everything would be still . . . waiting . . . listening! The silence, from having been merely a form of muffled sound, or perhaps a negation of it, became itself positive, active—could be felt and tested by the senses. There it was again, that creaking—as if someone was listening . . . someone certainly . . . someone standing on a loose board, crouching down in the darkness outside, afraid to tread for fear of waking one. Then would follow a distraction. A new code would be rapped out as something tapped on the window pane . . . tap—tap—tap, like a mad thing. Only the wind with that branch of ivy, she supposed. There it was again . . . tap—tap . . . like a mad thing trying to get into her room . . . tap—tap . . . into her very head, it seemed! Outside the house a dog would bark once, menacingly, and then its rough voice would die suddenly, as if silenced. Footsteps would tread again down the long passages, footsteps more distinct than ever this time. And once or twice they lingered stealthily at the bolted door; the handle would creak, grasped very carefully, turned by an invisible hand; and was there not the sound of a smothered, animal-like breathing? The wolf-at-the-door, the wolf-at-the-door, she says to herself in that fevered mind, where it seems as if two people, two strangers, were carrying on a whispered conversation of interminable length. Then silence comes once more; an unequalled stillness pours into the room, and into the corridors outside, so that the tapping, when it returns, takes on a new quality, rippling this

quiet blackness with enlarging circles of sound, as when a stone is cast into a small pool. Tap—tap—tap . . . again tap. Perhaps she is only dead, being fastened into her coffin. Tap—tap . . . they are nailing it down, tap—tap; and she lies dead in the silence for ever. Then far away the taps sound out again, and the coffin is unnailed. But this time it is the parrot rapping upon the bars of his domelike cage with his hard beak; and she is reassured. Grey light clutches again at the swathed windows, and the furniture of the room grows slowly into its accustomed shape; the things round her fall back again into their familiar contours, and are recognizable as themselves, for in the night they had assumed new positions, new shapes, strange attitudes . . . and the poor nervous creature lying on the rumpled bed falls asleep for an hour or two.

But as the light drips stealthily in, filling the black hollows of room and corridor, the housemaids, warned by Nurse Gooch to be more than usually quiet, scratch gently in the passage outside like so many mice, scratch with a gentle feeble sound that must inevitably rouse anyone—even a person who sleeps well by habit and is at that moment deep-rooted in slumber. For this timid, rodent-like noise is more irritating to the strongest nerves, will awaken more surely, than any of that loud, sudden music to which we are accustomed—that music of blows rained accidentally but with great force upon the fragile legs and corners of old furniture or brittle carving of ancient gilded frames—blows delivered with the back of an ever so light feathery brush. Thus Mrs. Tonge would open her eyes upon one more hot and calm morning.

As she lay there, in the semi-darkness, she could hear faint voices sounding in the passage. Soon after she has rung her bell, Nurse Gooch comes in with the letters, as

clean and kind as is possible for a human being to be, bright as are all trained nurses in the early morning; too bright, perhaps, too wide awake, and already making the best of it. Her hair has a dark golden colour in it under the light, and gleams very brightly under the cap she is wearing, while she talks in an even, soothing voice. As she goes down the corridor toward the invalid's room, the housemaids take her passing presence for a signal that they may resume that noisy bustle of cleanliness with which they salute each day. Suddenly motes of dust whirl up into the air beneath their brushes, turning under the already searching rays of the sun to columns and twisted pillars of sparkling glass that support this heavy firmament, pillars prism-like in the radiant array of their colour. As the housemaids, bent nearly double in their long white print dresses, move slowly over the carpet, brush in one hand, dustpan in the other, their movements break up these columns, so that the atoms that compose them fall through the air like so many sequins, and are violently agitated; then these take on new shapes, and from pillars are converted into obelisks, pyramids, rectangles, and all the variety of glittering forms that, bound by the angles of straight lines, can be imposed upon this dull air and earth by the lance-like rays of the morning sun.

In the room she still lies in bed, turning over the unopened envelopes of her letters. Gooch goes to the window and talks to the parrot. As she uncovers the cage the bird breaks into its metallic laughter, that rattles down through the open window into the shrubbery, like so many brassy rings thrown down by a juggler, for they curve in again at the pantry-window, where John the footman is standing in an apron, cleaning the silver with a dirty-looking piece of old yellow leather and some gritty rose-

pink paste. As he polishes the convex mirror formed by the flanks of the silver bowl, while his face reflected in one side assumes a grotesque appearance, the contorted trees and twisted perspective of lawn and garden show in the other. The second housemaid peeps in. "Oh, you do look a sight!" she cries, bridling with laughter, pointing to the bowl in his hand. "I may be a sight," he says, "or I may not, but I'm not a blarsted slave, am I?" "Well, you needn't answer so nasty," she said. "It's not that, it's that parrot—'ark at it now. I shall be glad when 'e comes back; one can't do no right in this place. Everything is wrong. First it's one damn thing, then another. Nurse sticks it like a soldier," he says, "but I stand up for my rights! I'm not a slave, I'm not, that I should stand there letting that blarsted parrot screech at me like a sergeant-major on a parade ground, and her talking a lot of nonsense. I'd like to wring its bloody neck, I would—they're a pair of them, they are!"

And certainly—Nurse Gooch herself had to admit it—the invalid was this summer more than ever exacting. For many months past she had worried her husband about a summer-house, for which she had formed one of those queer, urgent longings that sick people consider themselves free to indulge. The hut had stood there in the woods, year after year, unnoticed, falling to damp decay, when, as if given new eyes, Mrs. Tonge saw it for the first time, and determined to make it her own. Here, she felt, it would be possible to sit quietly, rest peacefully, in an atmosphere different from that of the Grove, and perhaps find that sleep denied her in any other place. As the summer-house was in a very dilapidated condition, she asked her husband to have it repaired for her, but met with a very unexpected opposition. The Colonel, used as he was to furthering every plan of his sick wife, abso-

lutely ignored this new entreaty. Which fact, unfortunately, only strengthened her determination, and made her persist in her caprice.

There was, in reality, some danger in letting Mrs. Tonge remain alone for a long period in a spot so remote from the house—she refused, again, to allow anyone to wait with her in this solitude—for though, as is the habit of permanent invalids, she might live for many years, yet she was a nervous, delicate woman, very liable to a sudden attack of illness, and here no help could reach her. But Dr. Maynard, with his customary inability to say “No” to a patient—or, perhaps, because he felt that the rest she hoped to obtain here would be more valuable to her than any unexpected attack of illness would be dangerous—gave his sanction to the new scheme. Colonel Tonge, however still urged the doctor to forbid it, making a strong protest against what he considered this folly, and himself steadfastly refused to have the place touched up in any way, or even swept out. The invalid changed her tactics: from anger she passed to a mood of plaintive injury. “I know, Humphrey,” she moaned at him, “that you only go on like that because you hate to think that I am having a peaceful moment. What harm *can* there be in going to the summer-house? It doesn’t hurt you, does it?”

The Colonel, patient as ever, would show no sign of ill-temper, putting the case as reasonably as he could. “Mary, my dear, it is really very unwise and foolish of you. I know how much unemployment there is, how unsettled is the countryside. You should see some of the tramps that are brought up before me on the Bench. That summer-house may seem deep in the woods, but it is very near the highroad. You can never tell who will come into the park. Anyone can get in. There’s no lodge near that

gate. I tell you, my dear, it isn't safe, I can't think how you can be so silly. It's folly, sheer folly!"

Mrs. Tonge cried a little: "I'm not afraid of tramps or motor-cars, or of anything on a road. But I know you'd do anything to prevent my getting any rest, Humphrey. I believe you'd like me to go without any sleep at all, as long as it didn't worry you. I know you're only waiting for me to die." . . . And the poor little man, discomfited, walked away. He was always so patient . . . like that . . . and kind, it made Nurse Gooch feel a great pity for him. But she thought he was wrong in this particular instance—wrong ever to oppose the invalid's wishes, however seldom he did so; and knowing her influence with him, she persuaded the Colonel to say no more about it, though he still seemed a little uneasy. Yet so great had become his reliance on the young nurse's judgment, that she easily induced him to pretend to his wife that he now thought his opposition had been mistaken.

But Mrs. Tonge could not be deceived. She knew perfectly well that he did not really approve, and it therefore gave her an increased pleasure to rest in the summer-house. Getting up later than ever in these hot months of the year, she would go there every afternoon. She forbade her two pets to be with her, so that a piteous, plaintive yapping filled the Grove each day after luncheon; only Polly, devoted Polly, was privileged to share this new solitude. Curiously enough, she did not feel frightened here. The rather ominous silence of the woods held no menace for her; she was happier among these dank shadows than in her own bedroom or placid flowering garden; and, whether from perversity or from some form of auto-suggestion, it was a fact that when the nurse walked out to the hut to bring the sick woman back to the

house for tea, she often found her in a slumber more peaceful than any she had enjoyed for years.

Between two and three o'clock each fine afternoon a queer procession could be seen walking over the lawn, between the beds of flowers that lay like embossed embroidery among the sleek-grass. First of all came Mrs. Tonge, never glancing aside at flower or tree, her upright carriage and slow-moving walk bestowing an almost ritual air on the proceedings; then followed the uniform-clad figure of the nurse, holding newspapers and a small cluster of three or four grapes for the parrot in one hand, while from the other dangled the sacred dome. The grapes, transparent, jewel-like, catching the prevailing colour, which was that of the penetrating glow of sunlight through green leaves, focused the eye as they moved along, till they seemed like some mystic regalia, even drawing the eye away from the more metallic colouring of the parrot, who, as he was borne along, shrieked continually, taking an obvious pleasure in scaring the poor timid birds of the English countryside by a display of flaming plumage and alien, rather acrid, laughter. Slowly they passed over the shrill, water-smooth lawns, where single high trees stood up fleecy against the sky, or, overburdened by the full weight of summer, trailed their branches right down upon the fragrant ground, into the dark woods, cloudy with foliage and rank with the smell of tall nettles, elder-trees, bracken, and all those things that grow in unkept places. No bird-song sounded now in this ultimate unfolding of the seasons, and the little path that led winding through this wilderness lay like a curling green ribbon, of a brighter hue than the surrounding shrubs and velvety with moss, from which weeds sprouted up at the corners like small tufts of feathers. This untidy ribbon, lying without purpose across the woodland

ground, led to the rustic hut which the caprice of some former mistress of the Grove had caused to be built here, rather pointlessly, some ninety years ago. Under a round roof, sloping down from its centre, and covered with the rough bark of trees, it lay mouldering beneath the structure of branches which hung motionless, as if cut from cardboard, on the heavy air. Sponge-like, it seemed, in its dampness, like some fungus lying about at the foot of a tree. Great knots of ivy clung to the upper part of the door, while, where the peeling bark had fallen away, were revealed arrangements of rusty nails, geometrical, but growing like thorns out of the wood. No view was framed in the pointed spaces of the two windows, except the light which trellised itself with the shadow of green leaves along the ground, or, flooding a stretch of bracken, played first on one leaf, then on another, bringing out unexpected patterns, making each bent-back leaf, as it was touched, the centre of some shifting arabesque design such as is woven in Eastern carpets.

The parrot would be placed on the dingy, bark-covered table; a grape would be half-peeled, and pressed, like a melting jewel, between the bars of the cage. The wire dome would then be draped ceremoniously with grey felt; the invalid would lie back in her long chair, a rug over her knees, the countless newspapers which it was her habit to read placed at her side; and Nurse Gooch would walk back briskly through the dark stillness of the wood out again into the droning odorous languor of the garden.

As Mrs. Tonge rested in her long chair, she found, certainly, a peace otherwise denied to her in the grim world of a sick woman's fancy. No argument, she determined, should ever persuade her to give up this siesta. Day followed day, each warm and bright-coloured as the

other; only the leaves became a little ranker in their scent, the woods yet more silent. But sometimes, as she was on the border of sleep, already seeing the queer avenues of that land which she could so seldom reach, while through its landscape she could still distinguish the more rational, familiar features of her real surroundings, a sound like a rushing wind, or as if gigantic wings were beating on the taut drum-like fabric of the air, would startle her for a moment, and, looking round, she would see the tall stiff trees lift up their canvas branches, caught by a false breeze, as a motor car passed between the two high hedges that concealed the road. Above this hidden white scar a high whirling column of dust would dance for a few seconds, as if it were some jinn of the air made visible for the moment; or, again, she would be lulled by the kindly, cooing voices of the country people, which floated over to her, for, as her husband had pointed out, the road was in reality very near the summer-house. But these things did not appear unpleasant to her; and, in any case, how much better were these explicable sounds than that state of suspended animation, alternating with a sudden show of life, which she had grown to dread so much at night in her own room!

The hot weather continued, and with it the life of the Grove. Colonel Tonge, as we have remarked, was away this summer more than was his wont, but the routine of the invalid, the nurse, and the servants repeated itself almost automatically. Every afternoon Nurse Gooch would walk out with the patient to the hut and would leave her there, only returning in time to fetch her back to the house for tea. One afternoon, when the Colonel was expected home from a short visit to Major Morley, an old friend and brother-officer whom, though a near neighbour, he saw very seldom, Mrs. Tonge suddenly

made up her mind to stay out in the summer-house for tea, telling the nurse to bring it out to her at five o'clock. Now, though there was nothing very original or startling in this idea Gooch who in matters relating to an invalid did not lack a certain subtlety, at once expostulated—not, indeed, from any feeling of disapproval, but because she well knew that the sick woman would in reality be deeply disappointed if her nurse seemed pleased, or even satisfied, with this new break away from the normal programme. The nurse, therefore, succeeded in putting up a show of anxiety, saying such things as that the patient ought not to be too long alone, or that the Colonel would be hurt and annoyed at finding his wife absent on his return. Finally, pretending to be persuaded against her better judgment, she agreed to bring tea out to the summer-house at five o'clock; then, placing the parrot's cage on the table, she covered it up, completed her ritual, and walked back to the house through the hot, strangely sultry, afternoon.

Mrs. Tonge felt an unaccustomed luxurious ease steal over her as she lay stretched out on her couch reading her papers, though perhaps perusing them less carefully to-day than was her custom. As a rule, she read them from cover to cover—births, deaths, marriages, sales, advertisements of all kinds; and while these journals represented every shade of political opinion, she was quite unmoved by their varying propaganda. She regarded them, in fact, as her one form of relaxation. This afternoon, however, she could not fix her attention on them. She peeled an amber, honey-scented grape for Polly, who mumbled back lovingly but softly. What a difference even an hour's sleep makes! She wondered when Humphrey was coming back, feeling that she had been rather hard with him lately—in fact, for some time past. With a

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sudden impulse of affection the image she had formed of him in her own mind was broken, and he became to her again the young man whom she had loved. She determined that she would be nicer to him; and certainly she felt a little better to-day. The afternoon in the summer-house seemed just warm enough . . . and quiet . . . nicely quiet she thought. Slowly, almost contentedly, and for the first time for many years without any fear, any nervous feeling, she stretched her limbs until every nerve in her body became quiet, and sighing gently, let sleep wash over her tired limbs, her worn-out mind, in soft delicious little waves.

But, though the dampness of the hut may have tempered the afternoon heat for Mrs. Tonge, it seemed very breathless outside. Even Nurse Gooch, as she sat sewing in her usually cool room, felt rather overcome. Oh, how hot it was! And the house was very still. As a rule you heard the servants chattering, moving through the passages; the jingling of silver or the rattling clatter of plates would reach you from pantry or kitchen. But to-day there was no noise—not a sound, except the hot insect-like droning of the sewing-machine, as she bent over it, running the needle along the white edge of the new linen, which filled the room with a rather stifling scent. But directly she stopped, even for an instant, silence flooded the room. Well, one can't look after a case like this for eighteen months without feeling odd oneself sometimes, she supposed! Yet there was something queer about the stillness. There must be going to be a storm, she thought.

No sound came in from farm or stable at this high-up, open window, on a level with the motionless green cradles of the birds; but down below on the lawn a single leaf would suddenly burst out into a mad fluttering, as if trying to indicate the secret of this general alarm, and then

be still, too still, as if it feared to be caught in an act of rebellion. . . . In the flower beds, then, a single violent coloured blossom would wave out wildly, flicker for an instant like a tongue of flame, then float once more stiffly upon the glazed heat. She was quite glad to finish her sewing, get the tea ready, and leave the house. But the air outside was even hotter than within—suffocating—so that one could not breathe, and as she passed out into the furtive silence of the woods she seemed separated from the world she knew. If I go on like this, she said to herself, I shall soon be the next invalid! Yet the walk seemed longer than it ought to be, so that she was continually being confronted with little twistings in it which she did not remember, though she had trodden this path at least four times a day for several months past. Still she knew, of course, that it must be the right one. But, somehow or other, she was startled this afternoon by things that usually she would not notice—the ordinary, rather inexplicable rustlings of the woodland, for instance. Doubtless these were audible yesterday as to-day, but as a rule she did not heed them; and once or twice, certainly, it seemed to her that she heard a peculiar scampering, as of a hurrying through thickets, or the dragging crackle of twigs and brambles as they released their clinging hold on invisible garments. It was with a distinct feeling of relief, then, that after what seemed quite a long walk, she caught sight of the summer-house round the next turning. It had a very human, friendly look to her this afternoon; yet it belonged so much to these woods, this soil, that it was like a large mushroom growing out of a taller green tangle. The invalid did not call out to her, even the parrot was silent—an indication, usually, that its mistress was asleep. (How queer it is the way she can sleep here, and nowhere else!) Nurse Gooch cried out cheerfully,

"Wake up, wake up! I've brought you your tea!" Still there was no answer, and, skirting the blind corner of the hut, carrying the tray in front of her, she was already standing in the low doorway before she had even cast a glance at its dark interior. Thrown suddenly into the quiet smallness of the summer-house, where she was at such close quarters with everything, almost within an arm's span of each wall, she was unable to breathe for a moment. An overwhelming sensation of nausea took possession of her, so that she felt that she, too, would fall upon that terrible floor. Yet, though the whole universe swung round, her trained eye observed the slaughter-house details. There lay the murdered woman, her head on one side, her skull crushed by some ferocious blow, her face twisted to a mask of terror—that queer unreasoning terror which had never left her. Dumb, blinking in its overturned cage, the parrot was hunched up, its feathers clotted together with blood. Clutching the bird's cage as if to save it from some fresh disaster, Nurse Gooch rushed wildly out of the summer-house into the motionless woods.

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As she approached the Grove, her own sense of discipline asserted itself, forcing her to slow down her pace, to set her mind a little more in order. But now it was, actually, that the full shock came to her, for in that sudden blind moment of fear, when her limbs had melted one into the other, when her heart had bounded to her very lips, she had been unable to think, had experienced no feeling except an endless surprise, pity, and disgust. Afterward curiosity, as well, intervened, and she began to wonder who had done this thing, and why such a brutal fate had engulfed the poor, timid, elderly woman.

And then she was forced to steel her soul for the next ordeal: she would have need of every particle of strength in mind and body, since it devolved upon her to break the news. Through the library windows she could see Colonel Tonge standing by the empty fireplace, and even while she was still labouring under the blow that had befallen her, she dreaded telling him of it as the not least awful incident in this terrible adventure—nearly as overwhelming, indeed, as had been the actual moment of discovery. Her respect, and fondness even, for him, her knowledge that his had not been a happy marriage, only made the task a more difficult one to face and endure.

With an unexpected nervous susceptibility the Colonel seemed to feel the burning, panting breath of tragedy almost before she had spoken. Perhaps something out of her control manifested itself in her face, in her air; but as she entered, he looked at her with eyes as fearful as her own, and it seemed as if he, too, were mastering his emotions to confront something that he dreaded. "Go on, go on," he said, "what is it?"

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Month followed month, and he still shut himself up in his room, till he became so changed in looks, in manner, as hardly to appear the same man. All pride, all self-importance had left him. The spring had gone out of his walk, the jauntiness out of dress and carriage. Every hour of the day he loaded himself with reproaches—for not having been firmer, for not having absolutely refused to allow his wife to stay out there alone—for having been away at the time of the tragedy. Gooch would hear him, unable to sleep at night, walking about the passages, pacing up and down, up and down, till the first grey light crept in at the corners of blind and cur-

tain. It was as if the spirit of sleepless terror that had haunted his wife had now transferred its temple to his body. Incapable of attending to the business of his estate, to which formerly he had devoted so much consideration, he now seldom left the house in the daytime, and, if he did, in whatever direction he might set out, his feet always led him sooner or later to the same place, and he would be startled, aghast to find himself in the woods again.

Anything that reminded him of his dead wife had to be hidden away. The two poor little dogs were removed by his married sister when she went home, after a quite unsuccessful attempt to cheer her brother and give him comfort. The parrot, now never laughing, never speaking, languished in an attic, attended only by Emily, the housemaid. The other servants, too, were kind to the bird, since it had for them a fatal attraction: not only was it connected with death, having about it the very odour of the cemetery, but was in itself the witness and only relic of a brutal crime, so that it possessed the charm popularly associated with a portion of hangman's rope, and, in addition, was a living thing possessed of a dreadful secret. But the parrot would never utter, and downstairs—where the conversation, however wide the circle of its origin, always in the end drew in on to one topic—they had to admit that Polly had never been the-same-like-since. Occasionally Emily would leave the door of the cage open, hoping that he would walk out or fly round as he used to do. But nothing could tempt him out of his battered dome. As for Colonel Tonge, he had never liked the bird, hating its harsh laughter, and this solitary, now silent witness of his wife's end filled him at present with an unconquerable aversion.

Great sympathy was evinced everywhere for the poor

widower, crushed under a catastrophe so unexpected and mysterious. But the public sympathy could do little to help him; and though some solution of the mystery might temporarily have distracted his mind, even if it could not have rallied his spirits, none was forthcoming. He went through all the sordid business associated with murder—inquest and interview; but the crime remained odd as ever in its total absence of warning, intention, or clue. Who, indeed, could have plotted to murder this invalid lady, possessed of few friends and no enemies? And what purpose was served by this intolerable brutality? It is true that, after a time, the police found a stained, blunt-headed club, obviously the weapon with which the fatal wound had been inflicted, buried deep in the bracken; but, in a sense, this discovery only removed the murder further from the public experience, in that the possible motive of theft was at the same time disposed of—for with this weapon were found the few rings, the gold watch, and small amount of money that the dead woman had about her, as she had lain asleep in the summer-house on that sultry August afternoon. The police, thinking it possible that these articles had been hidden from an impulse of fear, that the original motive had indeed been the ordinary one, arrested a tramp found wandering in the district, hiding himself at night under hedges and in the shelter of empty barns; but though he could not give a very detailed or convincing account of his doings on the day of the “Hut Murder”—as it was called—the evidence that connected him with the crime was not enough to secure his conviction. It remained, however, the impression of many people, among them of both Dr. Maynard and Nurse Gooch, that he was in reality guilty of the foul act of which he had been suspected. Colonel Tonge, though he followed every detail of the trial with

a painful interest, could never be induced to discuss the possible guilt of the tramp, but it was noticeable that after the man's release his nervous condition became more than ever marked, which led them to conclude that, in his opinion too, the person accused should never have been acquitted.

The bereaved husband's insomnia troubled him sorely; he had no peace, no rest by day or night. The only person able to bring him relief to lighten his burden even for a moment, was Nurse Gooch; so that Dr. Maynard felt it his duty, for once, to insist on her remaining at the Grove until the Colonel should display some sign of returning health and a reviving spirit. The nurse, for her part, had always liked, pitied, and admired him, while, by one of those curious human instincts, all the compassion, all the affection even, which she had given so freely to the dead woman, was now made over to her new patient. And then she, too, felt remorse, had things on her mind with which to reproach herself. How well she could understand and sympathize with his self-accusation! Why, conscious as she had been of her influence over him, had she not supported the Colonel's wise protest against his wife's use of the summer-house, instead of urging, as she had done, that it was a reasonable plan, and finally persuading him to withdraw his objection to it? Terribly she felt now the responsibility so foolishly incurred, that perhaps she was in part to blame for the tragedy, even in the matter of allowing the invalid to wait out in the summer-house for tea on that dreadful afternoon; and in the months that followed the murder it was one of the few pleasant things in her life to reflect that she could, by her presence and sympathetic understanding, lessen his misery ever so little, giving him for a little while a passing sense of comfort.

When, after many long, lonely months, he made her an offer of marriage, saying that life without her support would be to him an intolerable burden, she accepted his proposal, realizing that the interest she felt in him, the overwhelming pity that sometimes clutched at her heart, was but a disguise for love. Regardless of any difference in age or outlook, she hoped, by becoming his wife, to help and ease the remainder of a life, the unhappy tenor of which had now deepened into a more dreadful tone.

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The honeymoon was spent in France, in order to make for them both a complete break from the background of their lives. But even among the lush meadows and rich trees of Normandy, away from any sting of association, Humphrey did not recover at once, as she had hoped, his old buoyancy. Listless, uneasy, restless, he would for hours be silent, wrapped in a melancholy that did not ordinarily belong to his temperament, while, in his broken slumber and sudden awakenings, his wife could detect the existence of a great well of sorrow that even her anxious affection could not plumb, a grief her love could not solace. The discovery of the extent of his affliction caused her further worry, made her dread their return to the scene of his past life. But as time passed it was obvious that his spirits were returning; and when he told her that during their absence the Grove had been entirely repainted and redecorated, she began to feel happier, hoping that it would seem to him like the beginning of a new life.

Almost two years to a day after the crime, they returned from their honeymoon, but Colonel Tonge did not seem conscious of any sense of anniversary, while she,

naturally would not mention it to him. But it made her feel a little uneasy.

As they drove back from the station, the new chauffeur quite by chance, by one of those dreadful inspirations which are only given to stupid people, drove the newly married couple down the concealed road near the summer-house, instead of taking them in by the near lodge. Colonel Tonge obviously experienced no emotion, but his wife felt for the moment as if she would be stifled between these two high hedges. How like was this afternoon to that other one! No leaf moved on any tree, no bird let its song trickle through the cloudy, too-dark leafage; the air was hot, motionless and still, though through it ran those same secret tremors, inexplicable tremblings. For the new Mrs. Tonge the whole atmosphere was stained with memories.

Yet she soon forgot the uneasy promptings of her heart and mind in the pleasure she felt at the reception which awaited them. She had always been a favourite with the servants, and the latter could never forget the poor Colonel's sufferings, so that they had taken an especial care to give the newly wedded pair an inspiriting welcome. The Colonel stopped to talk with them, while Mrs. Tonge, eager to see what alterations had been made, stepped into the house alone. It looked charming, she thought, with the new paint smooth on the old walls; and, unable to repress a slight thrill of pleasure, which she felt to be wrong, though she could not quite exorcise it, at being for the first time mistress of a house—and such a lovely house—she walked on through the empty, gleaming rooms that led one into the other. The last room was the boudoir. She entered it softly, closing the door behind her, wishing to explore its impression to the full, for she wondered whether it would make her feel a usurper,

a stranger in someone else's place. But no! it was a new room to her : gone was the feverish atmosphere of the sick-room, with its dead air, overheated and scented with innumerable flowers; gone was that dead look imparted by the yellow glaze of countless old photographs and by the spreading litter of trivial little objects. And while she bore toward the dead woman no feelings but those of pity and affection, yet, being of a practical nature, she was glad that nothing remained of the old mistress—nothing that could call up painful memories. The room was quiet and restful; the long windows stood wide open on to the pleasant water-cool spaces of the lawn, that unfolded up to the borders of the wood where stood tall fleecy green trees, while under their blue shadows ran the murmur of shallow streams. The healthy scents of tree and grass, the peaceful watery sounds, and the contented drone of the bees as, honey-gathering, they hung over the flowers, drifted into the house, diffusing an air of ease and comfort. This was *her* house, *her* garden, *her* home, and she now had a husband to whom she was devoted. Why, then, should she ever allow her mind to dwell on the tragedies of the past? Was it not better to forget utterly, to obliterate the memory in her husband, by offering him all her love, till gradually these possessions to which he had been so attached became dear to him again? . . . but just then, behind her, she heard the thin voice of the dead woman crying out—a voice grey with fear and breaking. "Humphrey," it sighed, "what is it? Oh, my God!" . . . And then the sound of a heavy dumb blow and low moaning, followed by burst after burst of idiot-laughter, as with a fluttering whirl of flaming green feathers the parrot flew up again to its empty attic.

FRANK PENN-SMITH

HANG

THE cat suddenly presented itself to the diffident old lady as she stood on her doorstep. It was a complete stranger and wore a disastrous appearance, being badly damaged about the fur and ears.

"Puss! Puss!" expostulated the pitiful old lady in a shocked way.

The cat glared at her for a time in doubt and misgiving. Then, erecting an irregular tail, it bolted past her into the house, crying "Hang!" in a shriil tone.

What was she to do?

The cat made the house its home. She had not the heart, she said, to turn it out. Perhaps she had not the chin to do it—for determination requires chin. Not that the cat had any particular chin, but then its determination showed in its eyes: gloomy, lustrous eyes, that were resolute, nay ruthless, even when it was purring.

The diffident old lady looked upon it with pride and misgiving.

"It took to me at once!" she would say, and that was really what happened. The cat had taken to her, and the house, and everything that was in it, at that one decisive instant on the doorstep. "This will do!" it had said to itself, and looked no farther.

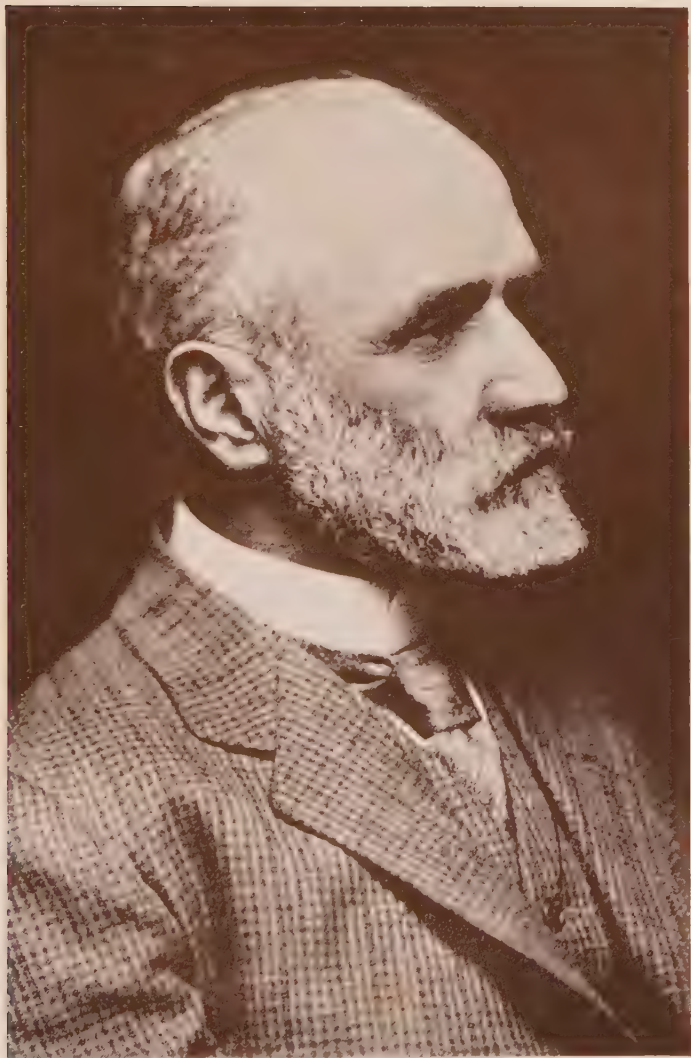
The old lady was timidly methodical. As she had been set going in her youth she would go on, until the works would slow down and the pendulum stop. But there was always an irresponsible uncertainty about the cat and its actions. Even when nodding on the hearthrug, it would suddenly whisper "Hang!" and rush off as though in response to some invisible summons. Yes, there was a mystery about the cat. Its eyes showed it when she caught it up and looked deep into them. Then it would struggle and break away from her.

In the course of time they became necessary to each other, this strangely assorted couple. The cat introduced just that amount of untamed nature into the atmosphere which appealed to the old lady and made perfect their desolate companionship.

But it was a peculiar animal. She admitted that she could not regulate it.

"It goes its way and I go mine," she would say. But she didn't. She went the cat's way. If the animal mewed, she would leave what she was doing to attend to it. If it patted her with its paw, which it would do when neglected, she would drop her work at once and talk to it, until it began to doze comfortably. Her talk was foolish, no doubt, but in the right tone, and cat's language is tone, not words.

But an observer might have noticed that the cat did not reciprocate these unselfish attentions. True, it would sometimes trot after her—but that was into the larder. For the rest it was extraordinarily contradictory. It would never stay where it was put, nor do what was wished. If she wanted it to remain in one place, no bonds could restrain it; but if she wished it to stay away, no vigilance could prevent its silent return when least expected. If she wanted to go out, the cat would be wait-



FRANK PENN-SMITH



ing to come in, and when the door was opened would rush in past her, crying "Hang!" in a shrill tone. But if she were coming in, it would be anxiously watching to get out, and would rush forth past her crying "Hang!" in its weird voice; though, once out, energy would desert it, and it would prowls about in the grass like a modified tiger in two minds.

But there! Why make so much of a mere cat? Because no one could help it—or rather because the old lady couldn't. The secretive savagery and unconquerable disposition of the animal appealed to the last carnivorous sparks of its timid old mistress's ancestors, for she was the almost-burnt-out ember from the souls of blood-thirsty berserkers who had stuck at nothing in their day.

But there was altogether too much berserker about the old lady's cousin who suddenly came to live with her. She was a red-faced woman, with the voice of a wheelbarrow and the complexion of a brick. Her clack and scream were heard all over the once silent dwelling. She had come on a visit and stayed, not to be got rid of. She had insisted on paying half the rent, and simply annexed the whole establishment, saying that the old lady must not be left alone. The latter shrank from her, wounded to the very heart by the desecrations of her little foolish privacies, but helpless to resist. The coarser nature could not be made to feel, and her own feelings would not allow her to try to make it.

The new-comer settled down to the work of her heart—to have everything her own way. She altered everything by degrees, to the unspeakable distress of the old lady, whose nervous rebellions were pitiful in their futility. But in changing everything she came into conflict with the habits of the cat, which she had scarcely heeded before this.

Now that it attracted her attention she saw a concentrated malignance in its glance whenever she came near; though it generally pretended not to see her, fixing its attention in a solemn stare on something else, or stalking uneasily about with an insulted expression, jerking its tail convulsively.

Time wore on, and intimacy brought irritability. The discontented temper of the red-faced woman, which had been dormant while the place was new, began to churn the moral atmosphere of the dwelling. The timid old lady entrenched herself, as well as she could, in silence, which aggravated the positive woman, eager to dominate everything, even the ideas of others.

For this reason the latter could not endure the cat. Its obstinacy and activity were greater than her own and she could not crush it, while accidents often gave it the advantage.

"Oh, the brute!" she gasped, when she had stumbled over it down the cellar steps. "It nearly broke my neck."

The old lady tittered, but stopped short in a fit of nervousness. The cousin was fat and had no neck. Her chin stood out from her chest like the ram of a destroyer. Her face flushed a deeper red as she glared at the yellow-eyed cat crouching in the corner.

"If I had the poker I'd kill it!" she cried.

"Hush! Hush!" went the horrified old lady.

"I would then!" shrieked the other. "You and your beast of a cat! Yah!" she cried, stamping at the animal in the corner.

Next instant, with a horrid cry—half gurgle, half squeal—the cat sprang right at her face in a frenzy of fury. With a snap like a steel trap it had bitten her cheek and scored her face across with a pawful of claws before she could cry out. In her backward start the

woman tripped over the fender, and fell with a crash among the fire-irons. The elder woman stood simply petrified, her timid eyes dilated, her hands clasped.

The cat had vanished like a black flash. The red-faced woman gradually got up, unhelped, her face bleeding.

"There!" she said. "See what you have done now! You and your cat!"

"I'm very sorry—very sorry," twittered the old lady, recovering her voice and coming forward. "How very dreadful! Are you much hurt? Let me see!"

"Go away!" returned the other bitterly, with handkerchief to face. "You and your wild cat!"

"But you shouldn't have teased it."

"It shall be killed!" said the red-faced woman. The old lady drew herself tremblingly together.

"The cat shan't be touched—except by me," she said.

"I shall leave the house!" exclaimed the other.

The old lady looked eagerly at her, but her lips were silent.

"I won't live in the house with a mad cat and a fool!" spluttered the fat woman. "It isn't safe—cats' bites—poisonous—lockjaw," she whined. And so it went on—stormy silence broken by squalls of reproach; but the old lady, tremulously silent, clung with timid obstinacy to protecting the life of the cat.

"What do you mean to do?" asked the fat woman hoarsely at last.

"If we can't agree," quavered the old lady, "one of us had better go.

"Which is it to be?"

There was a silence.

"Shall we draw lots?" asked the red-faced woman, leering at the old lady, who looked up eagerly.

"Anything you like!" she whispered, only too anxious for any ending to this dreadful partnership.

At that moment the closed door clicked and clattered. It was the cat trying to get in.

"There!" cried the fat woman. "The cat back again!" Then, after a pause: "If the cat mews when you open the door, you are to go. If the cat comes in silent—I shall go!"

This was a transparent fraud. The cat always cried out on entering. Nevertheless, after a moment's anxious hesitation, the old lady, willing to risk anything, even her old home, to an escape from this tyranny, grasped at the alternative. The absurdity of the bargain was lost sight of in the importance of the issue.

The agitated old lady raised her hand timidly to the latch, and, with her other hand on her breast, stared in a helpless way at the slowly entering cat. The cat, with chary, calculating steps, came creeping in.

It jerked a look up at its mistress and seemed about to speak, but checked itself and licked its reluctant lips into silence.

Then it advanced a few steps and leered at its enemy, as it adjusted its eyes to the lamp on the table. The red-faced woman regarded it with hatred and expectancy.

The cat then began to peer at her venomously, with its ears bent obliquely backward and its fur rising.

It lifted its head suddenly and glared at her over an imaginary obstacle. Then it stooped and looked for a length of time under the imaginary obstacle. Lastly, with a furtive, tigerish back-glance to see where the door was, it retreated slowly backward, step by step to the threshold, in complete silence.

Then it bolted out back into the darkness.

The old lady gave a sigh of relief.

The red-faced woman got on to her feet.

"I shall go and put on my hat at once!" she cried.

"Oh, not to-night!" mildly remonstrated the old lady, who had found her tongue.

"This very minute!" cried the other. "You have turned me out of the house and I mean to go. You shan't stop me. I will go next door and tell them why."

Even this threat did not seem to ruffle the gentle hopefulness that was returning to the outraged nature of the elder woman.

"Oh, if you must, you must," she murmured.

"I *will*!" cried the other.

And strange to say she did.

When she had gone the old lady sat for an indefinite time on the bottom stair, regardless of the guttering of the candle which she had placed on the ground after her cousin had left. The house seemed emptied of some disruptive agency, and the old lady sat there, slowly settling down into her old plane of thought.

"I shall move everything back into its proper place in the morning," she murmured.

Then she arose, and looked out at the door, as though to make sure the tyrant was indeed gone.

At the moment the cat appeared, large-eyed with the pathos that succeeds fury. Its fur was still on end. It looked up at her disconsolately.

"Puss!" she whispered. "Come in, Puss!"

The cat raised its tail and trotted solemnly through the half-opened door with a low, melancholy whimper.

Then it stole slowly on tiptoe from room to room, looking keenly everywhere and sniffing anxiously in the air.

Finally, when quite assured of the disappearance of

its enemy, it flung itself, in a passion of purrs, at the feet of its still trembling mistress, and, gazing yearningly up at her through its mysterious slits of eyes, it fondly murmured "Hang!"

J. C. SQUIRE

THE MAN WHO KEPT A DIARY

I

MR. WILLIAM WIGGLESWORTH was a bachelor. He had greying hair, a bald spot, a small moustache, chambers in Gray's Inn, and a respectable, but not a bloated, income. His only near relative was his niece Mary, who was engaged in social work. Now it was nursing, now it was education, now it was the promotion of international harmony. She had poorly paid jobs in connection with all these successively, and she more than earned her pay, for her ability was considerable and her disinterested idealism even more notable still. They often talked of society and the duties of its members.

"Well, uncle," Mary would say, "no doubt you are very kind in your own circle. You help your charwoman's family, you have helped me, I have sometimes persuaded you to subscribe, and you give handsome Christmas boxes to the porter at the gate; but you really do not justify your existence."

"My existence?" Mr. Wigglesworth would murmur in reply. "Can I really be of importance to any one? I am a very humble person, really. I merely want to go on my quiet way. I am unfitted at this stage to earn my living. I know nothing whatever about politics; besides

which, nobody in politics would ever take me seriously. I make what you would consider a good use of the margin of my small income; my pleasures, which consist of reading a little and observing the world a little, are surely harmless. I beg you do not attempt to convert me into something other than I am."

"Oh, uncle, you are hopeless!" Mary would reply; and, with a sigh, she would resign herself to enjoying the admirable luncheon that he had provided for her.

The sherry and the claret she often forgot to commend; but, idealist though she was, she never attempted to conceal her liking for the lobster, of which she always secured the major share. After luncheon, with her coffee-cup in her hand, she would walk round the room, looking a little enviously at his books, which were numerous and well bound. She knew so little about them and she wished she had time to know more. Yet at the end, despite all their mutual affection, she always went away wondering whether this selfish bachelor existence ought to be tolerated. Was not such epicureanism the canker which destroyed empires? Was not Mr. Wigglesworth, however modest and conventionally virtuous, one of those drones in the hive whose parasitical presence makes the workers so justly angry? She would sometimes discuss him with her more intimate friends.

"I know," she would say, "that it is hopeless to expect him to go into the House, but if only he would serve on committees, or become honorary secretary of the Life-boats or the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families, it would be better than nothing."

"But how on earth, my dear," the friend would reply, "does he spend his time?"

"Oh," she would reply, "fritters it away somehow. He goes to his club and he goes to private views, and



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J. C. SQUIRE



he sometimes goes out to tea and he sometimes gets asked to a City dinner. I believe he knows all the booksellers and picture-dealers, and old friends ask him away for week-ends. And sometimes he gives men's dinners in his chambers. Most of the men he asks are lawyers. In the morning he reads *The Times* and sticks in book-plates and throws out crumbs for the pigeons."

"What a life!"

"Yes, what a life!"

II

For the ninety-ninth time Mary had been tackling her uncle about his lack of occupation. He had, she thought, been more than usually annoying about it to-day. On previous occasions he had at least had the grace to be embarrassed by her reproaches and to try perpetually to change the subject. How well she knew those artless stratagems, the questions about her work, the comments on the morning's news, the solicitudes about her health, the remarks about letters which he had received from distant cousins in Australia, the sudden suspicions, even, that there was something wrong with the wine and that a fresh bottle must be obtained! "No, my dear Mary, let me get you another glass; I simply cannot allow you to drink that." To-day there had been an odd difference in the atmosphere, no evasion, no shamefaced excuses. Almost always in the past, though his appalling inner stubbornness and inertia had beaten her on the major issue, she had at least reduced his arguments to pulp. He had hardly even attempted to argue, only to beg immunity from too severe a condemnation. To-day he had assumed another and a very exasperating attitude; it was for all the world as though he had just parted from some bold, conscienceless, even misogynist ally in the

background who had braced him to fight for his evil cause. To-day there had been none of those rather pathetic silences under rebuke when care settled on Mr. Wigglesworth's forehead and his heavily lidded eyes looked sadly out of the window in search of the relief which he knew would not be forthcoming. There was a new confidence in his bearing, something almost of boisterousness. Her most direct assaults were met not merely with equanimity, but with jocularly. His eyes looked straight at her and they positively glittered with amusement. When she attacked, he almost seemed inclined to counter-attack; he even chaffed her. No captain of industry or attorney could have worn a more assured air, no successful sailor could have been more buoyant. "Was he drunk?" she asked herself for one awkward moment; but, no, he was not drunk. Yet he could not have been more unlike himself had he been at the crisis of a desperate bout.

"Occupation?" he said. "There are all sorts of occupations. I don't wish to criticize your mode of life, but I must ask you to suspend judgment about mine. I fully agree that my pursuits are not obviously utilitarian, but you really must take it from me that there may be more in them than meets the eye."

"It's all very well, Uncle William," she replied, "but I'm not going on my own opinion, though I should have thought that the way in which you waste your time was perfectly obvious, and I confess that until now I always thought you admitted it yourself. It isn't only me; everybody I know who knows you thinks it too dreadful that you haven't got any aim in life except just amusing yourself. I know you're not selfish at the bottom, but it does look like it, doesn't it?"

Mr. Wigglesworth bit his lip and hesitated a little, while Mary recollected, in a flash, all the occasions on which

she had tried to whitewash her uncle. "I know he's rather weak, but he's most awfully kind, really. He's too modest; he doesn't think himself capable of really useful work; and it's so difficult to change old habits, isn't it, especially for a bachelor living by himself?" Had she been mistaken? Had the mask of diffidence and frailty at last fallen from a nature which, in truth, had always been hard and wilful? She rose unhappily as soon as the meal was over.

"I'm very sorry, Uncle William," she said in a slightly strained voice, with her gaze averted, "I've got an appointment, and I shan't be able to wait for coffee."

"Look here, Mary," he said, with sudden decision, taking the door-handle from her and waving her to the comfortable window-seat, "you simply must stay for a few minutes."

Still a shade sulky, she half attempted to renew her protestations, but he would have none of them, and her chagrin was displaced by curiosity when he added, with a very earnest air, "I've found it very difficult to tell you, but I can't bear that you should misunderstand any longer. I am not so idle as you think." She was baffled and bewildered; images crowded on her confusedly: secret service, a mid-night concentration on the ologies. He was smiling blandly at her. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I am keeping a diary."

"What!" she exclaimed, as though he had said he was keeping a spaniel. "I can't see that there's anything remarkable about that. I keep one myself."

"Yes, Mary," he went on, "but mine may be a little different." Mr. Wigglesworth was always an exact man, with a dislike for overstatement, so he left it at that.

"Oh!" said Mary, rather mystified.

"Yes," added her uncle, with a slightly conspiratorial

air, "but I'd rather, if you don't mind, that you kept it a secret."

When she reached the Bureau of Psycho-Technical Research she at once went to the room of her friend, Agatha Bonner, and told her all about it. A passion for social reconstruction does not always imply a general education, but Agatha Bonner was unusually well read. She took in the situation at once.

"I don't know your uncle, Mary," she observed, "but I take it he is hardly likely to be a Marie Bashkirtseff. You are probably the niece of a modern classic. It's rather thrilling, Mary; it may be a great historical document."

"Well, I never!" said Mary. "The old fox!" But the cordiality of their relations was subsequently uninterrupted.

III

It is one thing to talk about a man behind his back and another to talk to him to his face. Many months elapsed before anybody directly mentioned his clandestine activities to Mr. Wigglesworth, and then it was a total stranger, a large lady with a treble chin whom he had taken down to dinner in a young Jewish politician's house in Bayswater. During the soup she looked at him coyly, and in a winning whisper said to him:

"Oh, dear Mr. Wigglesworth, I would give anything for a glance at your famous diary."

Our friend smiled urbanely, yet modestly, and observed:

"Honestly, I don't think you'd find it very interesting. People exaggerate so absurdly!" and then hastened to turn the conversation to Mr. Epstein's latest exhibition. The lady was pertinacious, and several times during the

meal showed an inclination to return to the theme; but Mr. Wigglesworth successfully fenced her off without direct rudeness and even managed to avoid conceding her an invitation to see his charming collection of pictures in his delightful chambers, about which she had heard so much. This encounter, had it been reached without preliminary warnings, might have startled Mr. Wigglesworth. In the old days, indeed, it would have been a matter of great surprise to him had any stranger at all disclosed not merely interest in, but bare knowledge of, his previous existence. He had walked quietly on the outskirts of the pulsing world and had grown accustomed to pass unnoticed. But during these last months the community had shown increasing symptoms of a new attitude toward him. Several college friends, who for years had forgotten him in the pursuit of their promising careers, had sent him invitations to stay in the country. He had gone; he had found himself included in carefully chosen and entirely enjoyable parties; more than this, diffident though he was, he had been unable to avoid feeling that he had held his own with the wittiest and the most important. The days had apparently passed when, except his few intimates, nobody asked him anywhere except to fill an odd chair, and when in a crowd he had been accustomed to find his partner, after a few perfunctory words to him, addressing herself to her other neighbour. And he confessed feeling to himself that he liked the change; it was agreeable to find people laughing in chorus at his little jokes, to be engaged, as equal with equal, in earnest discussions by persons at the centre of affairs, to be consulted as to his wishes, and to be persuaded into joining all the most pleasant excursions. His town life, meanwhile, had suffered a similar gradual transformation. Cards had begun to pour in on him from every-

body he had ever met and from some enterprising hostesses whom he had never met at all. Wherever he was asked, there he went. It was a congenial change to have a status in the world; he was beginning to talk very well and he was always the cause of good talk in others. It was especially stimulating to find so many people anxious to discover what his opinions were concerning art, letters, and politics; they seemed so often to wish to agree with him. Materially, he was also prospering. At the second large political reception to which he had gone a cabinet minister edged him aside into a corner, and, after putting very strongly his own side in a very complicated dispute then raging behind the scenes, gave him a financial tip on which he told him he could safely put his shirt. This Mr. Wigglesworth did, with the result that he found no difficulty at all in producing the large entrance fees and annual subscriptions of the three excellent clubs which he had recently been persuaded to join. In a thousand and one ways Mr. Wigglesworth had perceived the indications of a growing interest and prestige; as we have seen, therefore, it was no shock to him when point-blank he was informed that his carefully guarded secret was out. He did not even seem to mind.

IV

Barely two seasons had passed since all London that counts had grown familiar with the notion of Mr. Wigglesworth as chronicler-in-chief to his time before an ever-vigilant press became aware of him. The first paragraph which came to Mr. Wigglesworth's eyes was a scanty one, but significant in that nobody else under the rank of a countess was mentioned in it. It appeared in a column signed "Yvonne," and ran:

Amongst the well-known people seen at the Canine Waifs and Strays Thé-Dansant yesterday were Prince Hippos of Greece, the Grand Duke Justiman, Lord Ramsgate, Lady Clackmannan and her two charming children, Bertie and Gertie, and Mr. Herbert Wigglesworth, who watched with interest, but did not dance. *On dit*, by the way, that when Mr. Wigglesworth's diary appears, the dovecotes are likely to be muttered.

Only a few days elapsed, however, before a further and more elaborate reference was made, this time by a male *causeur*.

Yesterday at an exclusive club I listened to a fascinating conversation in which two statesmen of European reputation and a famous admiral took part. The subject was diaries and the possibility of our own eventful time providing posterity with a diarist of the standing and value of Pepys of Greville. The opinion was unanimous that a record of the kind was likeliest to come from the pen of Mr. Augustus Wigglesworth. Mr. Wigglesworth, who is one of the best-known and busiest of men about town, goes everywhere and sees everybody. For years he has kept a full day-to-day record, and a duchess told me the other day that Mr. Wigglesworth had been the repository of more secrets than even the late Sir George Lewis.

This became the stock form of all subsequent references, and they need not detain us further. It was natural that, after the matter had been openly referred to in print, Mr. Wigglesworth should on occasion find people bold enough to refer to it in his presence. Yet these were comparatively few. Now and then a brazen lady would beg for a glimpse of the diary. Once on a wet Sunday morning in the country his hostess blandly suggested that the company should come upstairs to her room and Mr.

Wigglesworth should read them a few innocuous extracts. "Do; only quite old ones about people who are all dead." Mr. Wigglesworth evaded the request easily; he carried no diary about with him.

"What about the entries you made last night?" cried one of the sprightlier of the younger ladies; while the Solicitor-General, who had that evening engaged Mr. Wigglesworth in an earnest conversation, gave an involuntary stare of consternation. "There was none," said Mr. Wigglesworth, and, as a concession, gave them a number of reminiscences that were very dull, although entirely truthful. The one place where frequent reference to his habits was made was the smoking-room of the liveliest and latest of his clubs. There he lived on terms of affectionate esteem with a number of subalterns whose sense of humour was crude. They would banter one another at tea-time, and when one of them had made a remark of more than ordinary obscenity, another would say, "Mind you put that in your diary, Wigglesworth," at which the whole assembly would burst into a loud guffaw.

"A busy man," they said in the paragraphs. To Mr. Wigglesworth's shame, it must be confessed that he was just as idle as he had been in the days of his retirement. He still lived in Gray's Inn; he still rose late; he merely went about more and talked more; nobody ever saw him working. But the world knew his *raison d'être*, and, besides that, it was impossible that a man who was seen so much could be conceived as anything but an active man. In truth he had never even joined a committee. In the old days, except for the sporadic and unsupported solicitations of Mary, he never received a request from anybody to do anything; he was too obscure. Nowadays nobody asked him, though he occasionally accepted the

office of patron or vice-president, because he was too celebrated.

"Who else can we put on?" the conversation would run.

"What about Wigglesworth? He's very sensible, and everybody knows him."

"Oh, you can't ask him; he's sure to have much too much on his hands to settle down to a routine job." A trusteeship of the National Portrait Gallery was another matter; that he was pleased to take, especially when he remembered how little notice anybody took of his opinions about art in the old days. This was his one real office.

He kept the diary; it was all he did. During those first few years he learned a good deal about human nature. In a few instances men with whom he had been intimate in the past seemed to avoid him; they grew constrained in his presence and looked askance. Once one of them broke silence and revealed to Mr. Wigglesworth the disadvantages of his new rôle. He was sitting in his library late at night, drinking a last whisky and reading Saint-Simon, when there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in," he called, laying down his book, covers upward; and there appeared, red and embarrassed, yet oddly resolute, the face of Sir Herbert Pantile, the K.C. "Excellent, Pantile!" exclaimed Wigglesworth. "It's splendid to see you. I thought you were never going to come near me again. Have a drink."

"No, thank you," said the lawyer, shortly, sitting upright on the edge of a hard chair. "Look here, Wigglesworth, there's something I want to speak to you about."

"Why not?" said Mr. Wigglesworth. "Though I don't suppose I shall be able to be of any use."

"Don't you, though? Well, I'd better come to the point at once. Do you remember that time in these rooms when I told you about that affair with Sylvia?"

"Why of course," said Mr. Wigglesworth, sympathetically, "and I can't say how sorry I was."

Pantile glared at him; then he suddenly burst forth: "Look here, to put it bluntly, I know very well you've got every word of it down in your damned diary." His eye caught a large black, enamelled deed-box in the corner; he flushed again, and almost shouted: "I won't have it. You've got to tear it out. It's monstrous. It's damned blackguardly. I'll—I'll—I'll take proceedings."

"Listen to me," said Mr. Wigglesworth, really perturbed and distressed. "I swear solemnly that not a word of that has ever passed my lips, nor is there a syllable about it in any diary I may have kept."

"What proof have I got?" asked Pantile, a little mollified, but still suspicious. "Everybody knows that a diarist would defeat his own objects if he told everybody what he was putting down. I'd like to see that day's entry."

"I can't show you that," said Mr. Wigglesworth. "I don't suppose you were the only person I saw that day, and the confidences of others must be respected as well as yours. On my word of honour as an old friend, your name is not so much as mentioned either on that page of my diary or any other. That's the absolute truth."

The assurance was at last believed; yet something about the mode in which it was conveyed seemed to leave Sir Herbert even more angry than he was before. Before he was red and now he was white. "Good night," he said brusquely, and walked out without shaking hands. Mr. Wigglesworth sighed and realized that, however silver the lining, there must always be a cloud. Yet how

small his clouds usually were in these days! Those who avoided him were as nothing in number compared with those who sought him out. Men saved up their jokes for him, and rattled them out breathlessly. Women dressed for him, strikingly and in a describable fashion, as though they wished to be raw material for epigrams; he was in a manner an elevator of social standards; at his approach the sober vegetable garden became the gay parterre; like the sun he illuminated everything upon which his radiance fell. Great men whose eyes would have absently glazed if left with him in the days of his obscurity now sparkled and shone to meet him. Many and various were the confidences he received. He knew, and was one of the very few who knew, why Crete had not made war on Corea, and for the sake of posterity three several persons had given him a full account of the negotiations which led to the passage of the Imperial Federation Act.

Private scandals rained upon him. Even when, as occasionally happened, a hubbub ceased awkwardly as he entered a room, and he felt all too sure that something was being concealed from him, it always reached him in the end. "You remember, Mr. Wigglesworth, that day when you found us all in the drawing-room together. Well, I wonder if you guessed what it was we were talking about. I'm sure I oughtn't to tell you, but I simply must. You'll hardly believe it, it's almost too disgraceful, but Billy says that Betty——" Yes, the diary was seldom mentioned, but it had a thousand contributors. And a thousand candidates. Several times a lady told him that she had been the *one real love* of some illustrious dead man; no fewer than three ladies made this assertion about their relations with the late Lord Strype, a man of unblemished repute. Painters, novelists, even sometimes

a preternaturally intelligent commercial magnate, sought the diarist's private and particular attention. Two or three people even bequeathed flattering miniatures of themselves to him when they died. Truly the faces that were represented to Mr. Wigglesworth were not always characteristic faces, and he was assured that, screened from the world, there was a better side to many natures deemed hard, ambitious, and grasping. He was astonished at the industry with which people endeavoured to reinforce the impression they had first made upon him. With him the wit was always preternaturally witty, the dreamer abnormally dreamy, the sagacious man sagacious indeed. He often marvelled at the aspirations thus innocently revealed to him, and wondered now and then, after a long encounter, whether or not he had imposed too great a histrionic stress upon some strenuous aspirant after a reputable immortality; whether or not sometimes his departure might be the signal for a reaction, a collapse, a call for restoratives, a swoon even.

v

Nobody was surprised when Mr. William Wigglesworth became a K.B.E. The marvel was rather that so generally respected and trusted a figure should not have been honoured before. "For public services," the description in the list briefly ran; after all, he was patron and vice-president of a great many indispensable organizations, and he had contributed substantially to the National Art Collections Fund. The Prime Minister had insisted; otherwise Mr. Wigglesworth might have declined. He took a childish pleasure, when attending vast parties at which orders and decorations were worn by all save him, in being the only man in the room with a plain black coat. At such parties the diarist was, in his later

years, an invariable feature, much balder now, a little rounder, his moustache grown completely white. He would stand the complacent, but charming, centre of an admiring circle, or wander through the rooms exchanging cheery words with dowagers and diplomatists, artists, men of letters, and, with a due admixture of deference, princes of the blood. Sometimes Mary, now Mrs. Wilkins, would be there. "Yes," she would whisper proudly to her companion, "of course he's my uncle." And what, in such brilliant scenes, were the thoughts of Mr. Wigglesworth, or, as we must now call him, Sir William, as he moved so successfully through this world where events were being moulded and history, of which he was to be the recorder, made? He kept them to himself, as had always been his way; but they ran like this: "There is Barnby beckoning to me. He is shaping for an entry in the diary. He conceives it like this:

"'At the Queensferrys' crush I saw —— and Barnby. Poor fellow! he has taken on too much, and they overwork the willing horse. The Polish business is obviously weighing on his mind, but it is simply his duty to spare himself. We cannot afford to let him have a breakdown. He looked anxious, worried, but the lines he has contracted only make his thoughtful face more handsome.' Little does he realize that I should be much likelier to put it down like this: 'Saw that pompous ass Barnby at the Queensferrys'. His stupidity and smugness are bad enough, but that look of spurious concentration is more than I can bear. It was like his infernal cheek to pester me with his veiled abuse of all his colleagues.'

"And there again on the balcony is Palmer, the poet-aster. He has seen me, but of course he pretends not to have. I know what he wants. His pale profile against

the soft midnight sky, a strange alien in that worldly scene. Yes, I know all about that. The most disgusting *poseur* in London, and about the worst poet who ever deluded the world into taking him seriously. Poor little Jones over there in the corner is ten thousand times better. I'll go up and speak to him, though I shall probably frighten him out of his life." Then he would go down the staircase, chatting and nodding to the orders and decorations, get his hat and coat, and depart alone in a taxi for Gray's Inn. The porter would unbolt to him, and under the dark sky he would walk through the quiet old squares and up the rustling avenue of trees to his rooms and his secret, a mystery, an enigma, a sphinx; the repository of a myriad confessions and the divulger of none.

Diarists and non-diarists, we all travel the same road. The last entry must be made. There is a page filled, and the next page must remain empty forever. One night Sir William left a jolly men's party at Panton's studio looking as well as ever; next evening the papers recorded that he had been found dead in his chair. *The Times* on the following day had a long and respectful obituary notice. "Sir William," it said, "was a man of great energy and multifarious interests. His services will long be remembered. He had a host of friends and was on terms of close intimacy with half the most eminent men of his day. But it is quite possible, nay, likely, that to our remote descendants he may be far better known than to his contemporaries. It has long been matter of common report that throughout his life he was an indefatigable diarist. Few, if any, have been privileged to see his records, but his opportunities for observation were unique. Wigglesworth's diary may well take its place besides Pepys's and Greville's. The comparison is not too extravagant. Sir William's industry and opportuni-

ties were fully equal to those of his predecessors, and in point of wit and breadth of culture he surpassed both of them. We understand that the executors under Sir William's will are the Rt. Hon. Lord Barnby and Mr. Godfrey Palmer, the poet, both friends of long standing."

So it was, and in a codicil of the will Sir William not only gave his executors full discretion as to the publication and expurgation of his diary and the ultimate disposal of the manuscript, but provided that any profits arising therefrom should be divided between the executors named, assuming them to consent to act. The residue of the estate he left to his niece Mary, now the wife of John Wilkins, Esq., of Somerset House. The executors undertook the burden of the trust.

One spring morning, when the sun shone brightly and the rooks cawed cheerfully over the treetops in Bacon's Walk, a little company assembled in the old chambers, still tidy and comfortable, as their late tenant had left them. Lord Barnby had brought his secretary, Mr. Palmer had come alone; the fourth of the party was the deceased's solicitor, who had brought a bunch of keys. There was an air of expectation, even of excitement, about the party; Mr. Palmer fingered books on the shelves almost feverishly, while the solicitor cryptically fumbled with papers in his attaché-case. At last he was ready.

"Well, gentlemen," he said heartily, rubbing his hands, "we may now gaze upon the buried treasure." The key went into the lock, and was turned.

They pulled them out. There were four enormous volumes as large as ledgers. All except one were completely virgin of any writing. On the first page of that one there was a date carefully written and a note of the phase of the moon; underneath, in large block capitals, this sole and simple entry:

THIS IS THE DIARY I HAVE KEPT. I HAVE KEPT IT FOR YEARS. I THINK, IF PUBLISHED, IT SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AS IT STANDS. SHOULD MY EXECUTORS IN THEIR WISDOM THINK OTHERWISE, THE RESPONSIBILITY IS THEIRS.

W. W.

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

A TUG OF WAR

I

MENTION has been made in Quinneys' of that eminent firm of dealers in antiques, Messrs. Lark and Bundy. Gustavus Lark, at whose soft white hands Quinney had experienced bludgeonings, retired from active business before the war. His son, who took his place, was—as Quinney put it—"badly modelled out of the same rotten paste."

During the régime of Gustavus—and it will be remembered by the few that the great man closely resembled an august personage—Mr. Bundy's more predatory instincts were kept in check. Gustavus robbed on the grand scale. He had bought from Quinney a commode with panels painted by Angelica Kauffman for five hundred pounds and he had sold it to an American multi-millionaire for two thousand five hundred. Quinney never found this out till many years had passed. Gustavus Lark, with the help of an expert, the late Pressland, had convinced Quinney, then a young man, that the commode was a fine copy. Quinney had paid nine hundred for it. He lost a clear four hundred pounds over a misdeal, and, when he learned the truth, he swore to his faithful Susan that he would get even with Messrs. Lark and Bundy—some day.

It was not easy to get even or to get near such slippery customers. But Quinney became more sanguine after the retirement of Gustavus. Bundy, who could never be mistaken for a personage, cut capers upon thin ice. To change the metaphor, he sailed too near the reefs. The son of the great Gustavus had inherited his sire's moral obliquity without his caution and charm of manner. And, unhappily for the firm, the really big clients whom Gustavus treated with almost royal suavity and consideration were growing old. Many of them died. The younger collectors, more widely awake, displayed less confidence in Mr. Bundy. Accordingly it came to pass that Bundy fell back upon the commoner herd with whom it is much safer to deal dishonestly. Experts "vet" the purchases of rich collectors.

Quinney bided his time.

Sooner or later, so he believed, an All-just Providence would deliver Messrs. Lark and Bundy into his hand.

Susan said to him more than once:

"It isn't healthy, Joe, to cherish revengeful feelings."

To this Quinney replied cheerfully:

"God bless your dear heart! Bundy sent a Lark to me, and I mean to have a Lark with Bundy. He'll get the bird."

"It's touching pitch," said Susan.

The Cookson "affair" brought Messrs. Lark and Bundy to Quinney's particular notice. Cookson, almost staggering beneath the burden of coals of fire heaped upon his head by Susan, told Quinney a thing or two about the firm which sank into a retentive memory. Quinney could not "use" such information, but it occurred to him that Cookson, had he been a real "wrong 'un," might have extorted blackmail from his former employers. Cookson sailed for California.



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HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL



It may be mentioned here, incidentally, that after Posy's marriage, Susan, although losing a beloved daughter, gained the dearest wish of her heart. She and her Joe came together again in business. Susan was incapable of taking a sincere interest in "things" as opposed to "persons"—sticks and stones and graven images, as she disdainfully termed them. She never bought or sold. But Quinney took her fully into his confidence. He talked business with her, and listened, occasionally, to shrewd advice. Susan realized, upliftingly, that her Joe had come back to her. He wanted her, just as she had always wanted him. After the war, indeed, she entered upon an Indian summer of happiness and contentment.

Quinney was never impatient with visitors who looked at his "stuff" and didn't buy. He regarded them as walking advertisements of his establishment. Courteously treated, they might send bonafide buyers. And, all his life, he had thoroughly enjoyed talking about his gems, particularly to the young and nice-looking of the opposite sex.

One afternoon a prepossessing young lady drifted in. She flourished a notebook. In it she jotted down prices. Her interest in the Chippendale furniture was almost uncanny. Presently, Quinney began to suspect that she might be a dealer herself. But he decided that she didn't know enough. Her eager questions indicated ignorance of values. However, she bought one or two small "bits" without haggling. It was inevitable, of course, that Quinney led her into the sanctuary.

In that Holy of Holies, the young lady explained herself with artless candour.

"I have been to several of the big antique shops," she said. She added after a pause: "I came on here from Lark and Bundy's."

"Lark and Bundy's," repeated Quinney.

"They are big people?" she queried lightly.

"Nobody quite like 'em," said Quinney.

"Old Mr. Bundy was very kind to me—quite fatherly."

"Ah! If you had met Mr. Gustavus Lark."

"I did meet young Mr. Lark. They ask a great deal of money for their best things."

"They ask a stiffish price," admitted Quinney. "They don't always get what they ask."

"But Mr. Bundy enlightened me about his methods of doing business. He told me that he only bought genuine bits; then he adds a reasonable profit, and sells them."

"Sometimes," admitted Quinney.

"Mr. Bundy," continued the young lady, "told me that his firm undertook valuations, inventories and so forth. He says that people ought to know the value of what they have."

"Quite," said Quinney. "It's surprisin' to me they don't. Nobody knows that better than old Mr. Bundy."

"I believe," said the young lady, "that I have some good things, but I know nothing, absolutely nothing, about them."

"Find out about 'em," said Quinney curtly.

"Yes; that is what I propose to do. Young Mr. Lark is coming down to my little place—I only came into it a short time ago—to look over what I have and advise me."

"Very kind and accommodating, I'm sure." He continued, with a quizzical glance at his visitor, "Did Mr. Bundy suggest your seeing me? No. I thought not. Why did you come on to me, madame?"

"I'd heard of you, Mr. Quinney. Lord Mel told me about you. Really, I wasn't coming on, but——"

She paused.

"But—" murmured Quinney, insinuatingly.

The young lady laughed.

"It's such a tiny thing, I hardly like to mention it, but, as I say, Mr. Bundy showed me his Chippendale. Then he was called away and Mr. Lark took his place. I had noticed particularly a Chippendale mirror, very quaint, and curiously like one belonging to me. Mr. Bundy had mentioned the price—forty-five guineas. Passing it again with Mr. Lark I stopped to look at it, to make quite sure that it was just like mine. Mr. Lark said that he could let me have it for thirty-five guineas—quite a difference, wasn't it?"

"Mistakes happen," observed Quinney. "All the same, we don't make such mistakes here. Lord Mel will tell you that. Are you thinking of selling any of your things?"

"I may have to," she sighed. "That is why I am trying to find out values."

This ingenuous confession raised a smile, but Quinney reflected that she had played the game. She had bought a couple of bits. And he liked her. He distrusted the fatherly interest displayed by Mr. Bundy.

"Will you take a hint from me?" he asked bluntly. "Lord Mel has been a good friend of mine; he may be a friend of yours; I'm under great obligations to his lordship. I'd like to help any friend of his. I don't undertake valuations. I haven't the time. Young Mr. Lark knows values as well as any man in the trade. Let him value your things. Then I should like to see them and I should like, also, to see his valuation. My hint is this: don't sell one bit till I've had a squint at what you've got."

He spoke so earnestly that the young lady was visibly impressed.

"Thank you," she said pleasantly. "You are very

kind. This is my card. You will hear from me later."

II

Quinney took the card to Susan. She adjusted her pince-nez and glanced at it.

"Lady Ann Frothersham, Prior's Caundle, Somerset."

"Yes," said Quinney. "I shall hear all about her from Lord Mel. If I'm not wrong in my reckonin', Susie, she's a lamb keepin' company with a wolf."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Susan.

"Wolves, I should say, dear. Meanin'—Lark and Bundy."

"Well I never! You'll save her from them, Joe?"

Quinney sat down frowning. He seldom sat down till after closing time.

"It's my notion," he said slowly, "that Lark and Bundy are on the rampage. They've taken up this valuation stunt lately. They find time for it. A lot of stuff is floating into the market. They see it before it reaches the market. They get hold of it. And these little deals are done on the quiet. The old families are hard hit by taxation and what not. Some of 'em have to raise money. So they sell a picture here and a cabinet there and nobody is much the wiser. See?"

"Of course you told the young lady to have nothing to do with those hateful people."

"Of course I didn't, old dear. I want to catch 'em at their games. This young lady is my bait for 'em. I told her that Gussie Lark knew values, and so he does. I'm going to give that young man plenty of rope, and then he may hang himself."

He rose up, whistling cheerfully, and returned to his showrooms.

III

None the less, his natural optimism—not to mention his generosity in giving plenty of rope to Gussie Lark—was somewhat diminished on further reflection. All his instincts assured him that his enemies were up to mischief. But he couldn't divine what mischief it might be. Much perplexed, it occurred to his active mind that Tomlin, now in Bond Street, might enlighten him. Tomlin "kept in" with all the big dealers. Quinney disdained "knock-outs" and "rings." He pursued the honest and even tenor of his way, a broad highway. Many dealers hated him, because he labelled superb reproductions as such, selling them as "honest fakes." Probably no man in the trade had done more to educate the public as to the difference between the real, right thing and its counterfeit presentment.

Tomlin received him exuberantly. He looked aggressively opulent, which he was, bursting with self-importance.

"Glad to see you, Joe. Time is kind to you, old lad."

"I take care of myself," replied Quinney.

Tomlin grinned at him.

"You wouldn't come to see old T. T. unless you wanted something. What is it? Cough it up!"

"Right," said Quinney. "You're a rare rascal, Tom, but I can't help admiring your brazen impudence. I do want—information. What do you know about Lark and Bundy?"

"Out for their blood, eh? What price that Angelica Kauffman commode?"

"You're as sharp as ever, Tom. Yes; that rankles a bit after all these years. Are they in Queer Street?"

"I believe they are," replied Tomlin soberly. "Old Gustavus took a lot of capital out of the firm, and he pitchforked that lad into it. Bundy had to swallow him. More, when Gustavus left Bundy he took the brains. I do know for a fact that they've lost most of their big customers. And I know, also, that Bundy gambles a bit and more than a bit. For why? We happen to employ the same broker. Young Lark goes racin'. Yes, Joe, to please an old friend I don't mind telling you that their stock is slumping, but they do get hold of wonderful stuff. That beats me."

"It beats me," admitted Quinney.

"I dessay they steal some of it."

Before the Cookson adventure, Quinney would have denounced such a statement as wildly impossible. Even now he looked incredulous.

"Ever hang about their place, Joe?"

"Me? Not likely."

"You might spend your time worse. The topnotchers keep away from 'em. They sell to profiteers, to foreigners, fellows from the Brazils and the Argentine, fellows who ask no questions. You can take that from me, old lad, for what it's worth—say a dinner for two at Pagani's."

"Ever give anything away, Tom?"

"Advice, Joe, to a friend. You manage your own business, which is a good 'un, and leave Lark and Bundy to mismanage theirs."

Quinney chuckled.

"Tom," he said, as he reached for his hat, "you've put me wise. I'll order dinner for two at Pagani's next Thursday, seven-thirty sharp."

"I'll weigh in with a box for a show afterwards. Bye-bye!"

IV

Quinney failed to tell Susan that he had seen Tomlin, because Susan hated T. T. But he told himself that T. T. was right. Lark and Bundy were traffickers in stolen goods, about the most dangerous game that men can play.

"I shall run 'em to earth over this," he thought, and his eyes sparkled at the prospect.

Six weeks passed. It was just before Christmas when he received a letter from Lady Ann. She asked him to run down to Prior's Caundle for the day. She offered to pay expenses and the proper fee.

Quinney had heard of Prior's Caundle. Lord Mel gave him exact information, but not much of it. The manor house and some land had been left to Lady Ann by an uncle. Lord Mel had never seen the place. But he believed it held good stuff. He was reasonably certain that the uncle, a hard-riding, port-drinking squire, knew nothing about porcelain, pictures or furniture. "And I expect," he had added, "the niece knows as much."

A two-seater met Quinney at Nether Caundle, and he was whirled by Lady Ann, who drove her own car, through narrow lanes powdered with snow. Heavy clouds impended.

"It's freezing," said Lady Ann.

"And snowing," added Quinney.

Flakes were falling thickly before they reached the house. A staid butler opened the front door. Quinney beheld a roaring fire. Half frozen, he could think of nothing else. The butler relieved him of hat and overcoat. Lady Ann took her car to the garage.

"Can I offer you anything, sir, after your cold journey?"

"If you offer me a hot Scotch I won't refuse it."

Left for a minute alone, Quinney turned his back upon the fire and surveyed the hall. His first reflection was that he had come to Somerset on a fool's errand. The hall was full of rubbish. Good sporting prints hung upon the walls. A billiard table, covered with rugs and coats and newspapers occupied half the floor space. A circular rack was full of cues without tips. The easy chairs looked uneasy. Under the window was a long divan, unholstered in black horse-hair, upon a platform. Turning his warmed back upon these objects, Quinney beheld an eighteenth century clock upon the mantelpiece, and flanking it, two Early Worcester vases. He whistled softly as he gazed at these.

Lady Ann bustled in. Quinney decided that she might be twenty-eight years old. She wore a shabby but well-cut jacket and skirt. The butler appeared at the same time with a steaming tumbler.

"Whilst you are sipping your drink," said Lady Ann, "I'll fetch Mr. Lark's valuation. We shall have luncheon in an hour."

She walked off briskly. Quinney polished his spectacles.

Within a minute several sheets of typescript were thrust into his hand.

"I shall be back in a jiffy," observed Lady Ann. "I breed Runner ducks, and they don't like snow."

Quinney sat down, warmed by the fire and the hot whisky, warmed, too, by a pleasant reception.

He skimmed through the long inventory. Obviously there was good stuff in the manor house. And the valuer appeared, on the surface of things, to have done his duty. Quinney grunted, more puzzled than ever. Young Lark, for example, had set the right price upon the clock and the

Early Worcester vases. But the price was slightly higher than any dealer would care to pay.

"Prohibitive," growled Quinney.

Lady Ann came back, shaking herself.

"It's snowing harder than ever," she remarked.

The leisurely tour of the house began. The drawing-room was charming, very little rubbish there; and Quinney said so.

"Mr. Lark suggested to me that my best bits ought to be together. He kindly helped me to arrange this room."

"Couldn't have done it better myself, my lady."

"I had no idea that I possessed such valuable things."

"They are not undervalued," said Quinney, tapping the typescript. "Did Mr. Lark offer to buy any of your porcelain at his own valuation?"

"No; he didn't. Indeed, he urged me not to sell. He begged me to regard my things as a lock-up. That was his word. But, unfortunately, regarded as a sound investment, they don't bring in income."

"And you don't pay income tax upon them, my lady."

They wandered on and on. Quinney paused to admire many objects, but amongst them was little really superlative. At the end of the tour, he returned the typescript to its owner, saying quietly:

"Mr. Lark seems to have made a thorough job of this."

Then they went in to luncheon.

During luncheon Lady Ann talked briskly of hunting and Runner ducks. Her predecessor, a maternal uncle, had been an ardent follower of the chase all his life. Quinney hazarded the conjecture that this gentleman had collected the sporting prints which hung in the hall and the passages.

"He had them framed," replied Lady Ann. "My

grandfather collected them. He was mad about prints. I have portfolios full of prints."

Quinney became instantly alert. Like the stag at Ronan's rill, he seemed to "snuff the tainted gale." Perhaps he had "hit the line of a wily fox" after all. Prints had been included, *en bloc*, in the inventory. But the framed Alkens and Rowlandsons were not so included. A stiffish valuation had been placed on them.

"Portfolios?" he echoed.

"Yes; but nothing of much value. Mr. Lark went through them with me."

"Do you know about prints, my lady?"

"Very little, Mr. Quinney. Dear me! It is coming down. What a storm!"

Presently, she left her guest to drink his coffee and smoke a cigar in the dining-room. She returned in ten minutes with a rueful face.

"My groom says we shall never get to the station. I'm afraid you are snow-bound for a few hours."

Quinney shrugged his shoulders, philosophically.

"You might be in a colder house," murmured Lady Ann.

He agreed cordially. And accordingly by the sheer luck of things, a busy man was left alone with two large portfolios of prints which otherwise might have escaped notice. Within a few minutes he was chuckling and rubbing his hands. Then, systematically, he began to sort out the prints, arranging them in two sections. At tea-time his hostess found him still engrossed in his task and—as he put it afterwards—"running mute." At tea, she discoursed again upon hunting and Runner ducks.

"This place is remote," she admitted, "but from a hunting point of view well situated. As I shall have to give up hunting——"

"Give up hunting?" repeated Quinney. He quite understood what such an abstention implied to such a woman. Lord Mel had told him about Lady Ann. She had lost a devoted lover in France. Her brother was the head of a much impoverished family. As a lord of many acres heavily mortgaged he had been hit cruelly hard by the war. Lord Mel, discreetly mentioning these facts to Quinney, had hinted that Prior's Caundle might compensate a charming young woman for many scourgings.

"I can only afford one hunter now," said Lady Ann, but she spoke without a trace of petulance, being obviously not a whiner.

Quinney nodded. Very abruptly, with a queer smile on his face, he said:

"I want to ask you some questions about your prints. Did you say that your grandfather had collected all of them?"

"Yes. I can remember my people laughing at him. He poked his nose into some strange places. My mother used to scold him for wasting his time and his money."

"Um!" growled Quinney. "You are quite sure that neither you nor your uncle added to the collection?"

"Absolutely sure."

Quinney chuckled.

"Why do you laugh, Mr. Quinney?"

"When did your grandfather die, my lady?"

"Let me see. He died when I was fifteen. I'm nearly thirty. Yes; fifteen years ago."

"That is interesting—and exciting, because I'm prepared to swear, on oath, if necessary, that some of your prints are reproductions made since your grandfather's death."

Lady Ann exhibited astonishment.

"But—it's impossible. Besides, for many years before

his death, my grandfather bought no prints. He never left this house."

Quinney nodded solemnly. Lady Ann jumped up.

"Please show me these reproductions."

The prints lay upon a solid table at the end of the room. Quinney, assuming the authority of a field marshal upon the eve of battle, raised his voice :

"The originals," he began, "are very valuable, portraits by Reynolds and Romney, engraved by such artists as the Smiths, Marchi, Dean and Thomas Watson. The photographic reproductions are wonderful. The forgeries of colour prints are to be found everywhere ; some are difficult to detect ; some are easy."

He tapped a small pile beneath his hand.

"How did these come here?"

"I—I don't know."

Quinney, now in his natural element, picked up a specimen and held forth. We need not repeat what he said. He made it perfectly plain to his hostess that a number of reproductions lay before her, and he concluded on the highest note :

"The originals—if they were here—would be worth some two or three thousand pounds."

"You affirm that I have been robbed, Mr. Quinney?"

"It looks uncommonly like it, madam."

V

Further talk brought other facts to light. The portfolios had been locked up during the uncle's tenure of Prior's Caundle. Humanly speaking, young Mr. Lark had been the first to see them during his first visit, and he had paid two visits. All the servants were old and trusted retainers, except the younger maids. It was unthinkable, as Quinney pointed out, that any ordinary thief could have

stolen the originals and replaced them with copies. More, no ordinary thief would be able to dispose of rare mezzotints and colour prints. Later, just before dinner, a list of the engravings in the portfolio was taken out of an ancient brass-cornered desk. The missing originals were carefully enumerated in this tell-tale list.

"I think," said Quinney, "that we have him."

"Him?"

"Young Mr. Lark. Will you leave this delicate matter entirely in my hands, my lady?"

"Very willingly, but——"

Quinney held up a finger.

"I'm never so happy as when I combine pleasure with business, madam. It will be a real jam for me to stage-manage this little show-up. But I must have time to think things over. It isn't going to be easy. Let's say that the prints have disappeared. Where are they? Not a word to anybody. I have jotted down in my notebook the names. It is possible, of course, that your grandfather sold the originals, but who replaced them with reproductions made since his death? Master Lark. In his little way, he's clever. It wouldn't surprise me to discover that this valuation stunt has kept him out of the Bankruptcy Court. He pleases his clients by slightly overvaluing their stuff. They speak of him kindly."

"Yes; I have."

"Quite! He poses to gentlepeople as a big dealer beyond suspicion. He invites confidence. He is left alone to rummage in odd corners. He encourages his clients to talk about themselves. He finds out quickly if they know the value of what they've got. Very few do. He buys a good bit here and there. Having overvalued the less rare stuff, his quiet bid is accepted unhesitatingly. And people like you, my lady, don't tell their neighbours

about these little deals. Did Mr. Lark offer to buy any prints?"

"Yes; he did."

"And he offered what seemed to you a fair price, I dare say?"

"Oh, yes. I remember everything. He showed me a book giving prices of those prints in the hall. He offered to sell all my prints on commission."

"Very kind and thoughtful!"

"I refused because, somehow, I didn't like to sell what had been dear to my grandfather. And Mr. Lark told me that apart from the sporting prints I shouldn't get very much. I remember now that he suggested taking a few of them to London to be cleaned, but I didn't care to go to the expense."

"An astute gentleman, very!"

"I thought him to be a capable and straightforward young man."

"He's slipped up on these reproductions. The cleverest knaves make just such little mistakes. And I suppose he didn't know that you had a list?"

"No; I found the list only the other day."

"I think we have him," repeated Quinney, "and, if so, you needn't give up hunting, my lady."

"I shall leave this matter in your hands, Mr. Quinney."

VI

Quinney returned, next day, to his Susan. Rain fell at midnight and melted the snow. But the two-seater skidded more than once on its journey to the station. Quinney remarked facetiously:

"I wouldn't trust young Mr. Lark to drive me, my lady."

Upon arrival at his own house, he rang up the private

detective of whom mention has been made in a previous narrative, Mr. John Williams, whose plastic face disdained the baser uses of "make-up." To Mr. Williams certain reproductions of Reynolds and Romney portraits were shown. An original was placed beside them. Having received further instructions Mr. Williams went his way. Shortly afterwards an elderly gentleman called in Soho Square and asked to see the proprietor. Quinney appeared. The elderly gentleman exasperated the dealer almost beyond endurance, adopting a querulous tone and manner, crabbing good stuff, sniffing contemptuously at fair prices.

"Of course you know me, Mr. Quinney?"

"I don't," said Quinney curtly.

"I'm Williams."

Quinney shouted with laughter. He had feared, not without reason, that Mr. John Williams might be known to Messrs. Lark and Bundy.

Two days later, Mr. Williams reported progress. In the possession of Messrs. Lark and Bundy were certain mezzotints and prints in colour held firmly at a price. A memorandum in young Mr. Lark's handwriting set forth the names of these prints and the price demanded for them. Another paper in the same handwriting set forth the fact that by payment herewith acknowledged, of a certain sum, Mr. Ozias Bamberger, of Cincinnati, Ohio, had the right to exercise for one calendar month the option to purchase the said prints at the price agreed upon by both parties. To establish confidence, Mr. Bamberger had bought one print from Messrs. Lark and Bundy. Quinney looked lovingly at that print.

"It would have fetched more at auction, John, but they ain't selling these prints in public places."

Mr. Williams smiled and withdrew.

VII

After his retirement from active business, Mr. Gustavus Lark settled down in Sussex upon a property of some size and pretension. He became an ornament of the Bench of Magistrates and dispensed a gracious hospitality. Beholding him on the Bench or at the head of his table the most captious critic would have acclaimed him as a fine specimen of the English country gentleman, still hale and hearty, although past the Psalmist's allotted span of years.

He exhibited surprise when his butler told him that Mr. Joseph Quinney wished to see him. But he supposed, naturally enough, that Quinney happened to be in the neighbourhood and wished to pay his respects to a great man.

"I will see Mr. Quinney. Bring some whisky and the Calixto Lopez cigars.

A minute later Quinney was ushered into the presence.

"I am delighted to see you," murmured Mr. Lark.

"Thank you," replied Quinney briskly. "Snug crib you have here, Mr. Lark."

Gustavus raised a supercilious eyebrow. He would not have so described The Towers himself, but a seeker of the right phrase makes kind allowance for the disabilities of others. He smiled blandly:

"I am happy in my home, Mr. Quinney."

The butler appeared with the refreshments. Quinney declined whisky and a cigar.

"Never drink or smoke much in business hours," he declared.

"Really? But, surely you have not come to see me on business? I'm out of business, my dear sir."

"But you've an interest in the old firm, Mr. Lark."

"Yes, yes—an interest. I get my dividends, and the rest no longer concerns me."

He waved his white hand superbly.

For a minute or two Quinney dissembled. He felt like a cat, and Gustavus reminded him of a sleek white rat.

"We miss you, Mr. Lark; we do indeed."

"Ah, well, it's good of you to say that. Every dog has his day; I have had mine. I worked hard, as you know. On that account I can enjoy more appreciably my leisure."

Quinney divined from his manner that outsiders were not invited to disturb that leisure. He said respectfully:

"I should not presume, Mr. Lark, to intrude except upon a matter of urgent private importance."

Again Mr. Lark raised an eyebrow.

"Have you ever heard of Prior's Caundle?"

"Never."

He spoke with finality.

"Do you know Lady Ann Frothersham?"

"I was not even aware that she exists."

Quinney bowed, almost meekly. He was positive that Gustavus spoke truth. So much the better.

"Lady Ann Frothersham, who lives at Prior's Caundle, has been robbed of some rare and valuable prints."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and the job was cleverly done. Lady Ann is not an expert on prints. She knows all that there is to be known about Runner ducks. She inherited two portfolios of prints. The thief, guessing, possibly, that there might be a list of the prints, substituted reproductions for some originals. You and I, Mr. Lark, know that this little game has been played before."

Mr. Lark smiled. He had begun life as a "rapper,"

and it was said of him (by Tomlin and others) that in his eager youth he had substituted a false set of "London Cries" for the originals which he had discovered in a cottage. Quinney went on:

"The portfolios have been locked up at Prior's Caundle for many years. The reproductions have been executed quite recently."

He paused. Mr. Lark murmured placidly:

"In what way does this concern me, Mr. Quinney?"

"One man," said Quinney quietly, "has had access to these portfolios. He valued everything in the old manor house. When I heard his name I wondered why he undertook such valuations."

Mr. Lark winced. But his voice was silky as he observed:

"You think, Mr. Quinney, that this valuer stole the rare prints and substituted fakes?"

"I have proved that up to the hilt, Mr. Lark. The missing prints are in the hands of some big dealers. An American customer has an option of purchase on them. One he has already acquired. In the corner of this particular print is an incised mark, hardly visible, the mark used by the original collector. Now, sir, I come to you to ask what I ought to do."

"Ah! The firm you mention may have bought the prints in good faith."

"Unhappily, the young man who valued everything at Prior's Caundle, is a member of the firm in question."

"You don't say so. And what—what is your particular interest in this regrettable affair?"

"I am acting for Lady Ann Frothersham."

"She has instructed you to prosecute?"

"Not yet. The whole matter is unreservedly in my hands."

"You—you have approached the young man?"

"I preferred to approach his—father."

Quinney expected some violence of ejaculation. Mr. Lark remained monumentally impassive. He appeared to be thinking furiously—and he was.

"I approached the father first, Mr. Lark, because, long ago, he offered to pull me out of a tight place. I had paid nine hundred pounds for a commode with panels reputed to be painted by Angelica Kauffman. The father of this young man, an expert, told me that I had been had. He took the faked bit off my hands for five hundred pounds. It was worth that as a period piece."

Mr. Lark remained silent. He glanced searchingly at Quinney's inscrutable countenance.

"What," said Quinney softly, "do you advise me to do, Mr. Lark?"

A truly great man shows his quality in emergencies and exigencies. Gustavus Lark had something of the superb *charlatanerie* which distinguished Claude Duval. He had robbed like a monarch, never forgetting that, physically, he resembled one. A lesser man might have blustered.

"If it is really as you affirm, Mr. Quinney, the prints might be restored to their owner quietly without publicity."

"Yes but this option on them?"

"That, I admit, introduces complications. Speaking personally, I deprecate public washing of dirty linen. I am assuming, you will observe, that the linen is dirty."

"Filthy," said Quinney.

"You have approached the—the father of this young man because—because——?"

"Because I owed him something. I'd sooner settle

with him. And he's a rich man. And a man of position. If I know him, he would pay through his handsome nose to avert a scandal."

Gustavus nodded.

"You are wise, my dear Quinney, to keep even names out of this. And I commend your discretion in coming to me. What sum, in your opinion, ought the father to be called upon to pay?"

As he spoke his voice sank to a whisper.

"The American, Mr. Ozias Bamberger, is getting them too cheap. I couldn't advise Lady Ann to take less than twenty-five hundred guineas. Bamberger is paying the same number of pounds."

"Twenty-five hundred guineas," repeated Gustavus.

"And, in addition, Mr. Lark, if the matter is to go no further, there should be four hundred pounds, plus interest at five per cent., compounded for eighteen years, coming to me."

Mr. Lark, for the first time, betrayed excitement.

"What are you saying?"

"Call it a thousand pounds, Mr. Lark, not guineas. I'm no pincher. The father of that young man sold the commode for two thousand five hundred pounds. A rummy bit of coincidence, isn't it? I've waited eighteen years, Mr. Lark."

Gustavus rose with dignity. He walked to a table where his butler had placed the tray, and poured himself out a tot of whisky with a steady hand. Then he turned to Quinney.

"You exact your pound of flesh?"

"But I don't make it a guinea. And I might, Mr. Lark."

"You will hear from me," said Gustavus. "I wish you good-day, Mr. Quinney."

VIII

What passed between Gustavus Lark and his son, not to mention old Mr. Bundy, will never be known. Quinney received two cheques: one for twenty-five hundred guineas, and another for a thousand pounds. Lady Ann accepted gladly the bigger cheque, and bought two more hunters forthwith, which she named Lark and Bundy. She offered a very handsome commission to Quinney, who smiled as he refused it.

"I have," he said, "settled in full with old Mr. Lark over another matter. As I told you, my lady, this has been a combination for me of pleasure and business."

Susan, you may be sure, had a share of the loot. Her Joe doesn't know, or care, whether or not he compounded a felony.

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